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Assam govt to conduct door-to-door assessment of flood damage in 4 districts: CM



JORHAT, Aug 7: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said his government will conduct a door-to-door assessment of flood damage in the four worst-hit districts from August 9 to 30.

He asserted that no affected household will be left out and the government will provide maximum relief permissible as per norms.

At least 97 people have been killed, and over 1.68 lakh people remained affected in the deluge, with four eastern Assam districts bearing the worst impact.

"Concluded an extensive training meeting with officials from the 4 districts affected by #AssamFloods. From 9 to 30 August, our teams will undertake a door-to-door assessment of damage," Sarma said in a social media post after chairing a meeting with the officials of Jorhat, Sivasagar, Charaideo and Golaghat districts.

He said the district commissioners, co-district commissioners and circle officers must adopt a compassionate approach and ensure no affected household is left out.

"Officers concerned will upload images of the damage on a dedicated app. Thereafter, an assessment will be made by August 30, followed by

re-verification with affected families," Sarma said.

The chief minister maintained that the "guiding principle is clear, assess every genuine loss and provide the maximum relief permissible under existing norms".

Speaking to reporters later, Sarma said besides the top officials of the four districts, Assam Disaster Management Authority officers and several ministers and MLAs were also present in the meeting. He said training of the surveyors will commence in the districts from Saturday for the first phase of assessment from August 9 to 30.

"Our surveyors will collect photographs, etc, and a mobile application has been developed to upload the information," Sarma said.

He said after the first assessment list is compiled, it will be re-verified with the affected families, and by September 10, it is expected that the government will have an estimation of funds required for rehabilitation purposes.

"Once the estimate of the funds is known, we can start providing the requisite financial assistance for permanent rehabilitation," he added.

Sarma further said that schools (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Over 1.68 lakh people across 15 districts remain affected by the deluge ● Golaghat worst-hit with 54,000 affected

Assam flood situation remains grim, toll rises to 97

GUWAHATI, Aug 7: The flood situation in Assam remained critical as the toll rose to 97 with two more fatalities and over 1.68 lakh people across 15 districts were still affected by the deluge, officials said on Friday.

The railway connectivity via Sivasagar district, which was disrupted for nearly a fortnight due to damage to the tracks by floodwaters, has been restored, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) said.

The two deaths were reported from Golaghat and Udalguri districts, taking the toll in this year's flood to 97 so far, the officials said.

Golaghat, Sivasagar, Udalguri, Kamrup Metropolitan, Nagaon, Kamrup, Darrang, Sonitpur, Hojai, Lakhimpur, Biswanath, Jorhat, Charaideo, Karbi Anglong and Dhemajhi districts were affected by the deluge.

More than 1.68 lakh people were still reeling under floodwaters,



with Golaghat being the worst-affected district with around 54,000 people hit, followed by Sivasagar (49,000) and Jorhat (27,000), the officials said.

The number of affected people has increased from around 1.6 lakh

across 14 districts on Wednesday.

Altogether 133 relief camps and relief distribution centres are currently operational in six districts, giving shelter and assistance to around 45,000 displaced people.

A crop area of 14,382.26

hectares remained submerged.

Floodwaters have also damaged embankments, roads, bridges and other public infrastructure in several districts.

With the restoration of the railway tracks, train services in parts of the state were made operational in a limited manner since Thursday afternoon.

"Glad to share that the flood-affected railway section between Senghat-Amguri-Simaluguri-Sivasagar Town has been restored and made operational at 4 pm today. With this, direct train services between Guwahati and Dibrugarh via Lumding and Sivasagar can now resume," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said in a social media post on Thursday.

He thanked Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and the NFR authorities for restoring the vital rail link between Upper Assam and the rest of the country.

An NFR statement said its General Manager Chetan Kumar Shrivastava visited the affected sections and carried out a detailed inspection of the tracks, bridges and other infrastructure.

During the inspection, it was observed that many locals, including children, along with their belongings and livestock, were taking shelter on or near the railway tracks due to the flood-related situation.

"Considering the humanitarian concerns and prioritising public safety, it has been decided to initially operate only diesel locomotive-hauled trains on the restored sections. This precautionary measure has been taken to minimise the risk of electrocution and ensure the safety of flood-affected people until conditions become normal," it said.

Several trains, such as Nagaland Express, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Oppn cannot dictate which minister will come to House and respond: Rijiju

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: Amid a demand from the Congress and other parties that Home Minister Amit Shah should answer questions on the recent police action on protesting students here, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Friday asserted in the Lok Sabha that the opposition cannot dictate which minister will come to the House and respond.

As the House proceedings were disrupted again, Rijiju also said that Shah comes to Parliament every day and stays till late night. Shah is a man whose name sends shivers down the spine of extremists and terrorists, he said amid thumping of desks by members of the treasury benches.

"The day discussion begins here (in Lok Sabha) and when Amit

Shah responds, you (opposition) won't be able to hear (digest)," Rijiju told the protesting members.

According to the procedure, the minister who has listed business has to come to the House.

"You cannot dictate which minister will come to the House and who will respond. That is decided by the government and the Chair," the parliamentary affairs minister said.

The opposition has been demanding a response from Shah on the police crackdown on students, who were protesting against the NEET paper leak in the national capital last month.

As a result of the protests on this issue and other matters, the Monsoon session, which commenced on July 20, has witnessed continu-

ous disruptions. Rijiju also told the opposition members to stop disrupting the proceedings.

Chairman C P Radhakrishnan had on Thursday asked Rijiju to "echo the sentiments" of the opposition to the home minister as the opposition members continued with their demand for a response from Shah.

Amid the din on Friday, the House was adjourned to meet on Monday. During the Zero Hour, which went on for nearly 16 minutes, the House passed the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development (MSME) (Amendment) Bill, 2026 without debate. Besides, papers were listed as well as reports of various parliamentary committees were tabled.

Speaking to reporters in the Par-

liament House complex, Rijiju said Parliament continues to function despite repeated disruptions by the opposition.

"We have transacted business and passed the MSME Bill in the Lok Sabha. Business is continuing. Discussions have been fewer because the Congress and opposition parties disrupted proceedings by raising slogans.

"But business has been transacted and all NDA members in the Rajya Sabha participated in the debate and presented their views. There should be no confusion that the House has not functioned," he said.

Rijiju added that the House has functioned and bills have been passed. Only the discussions have been (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

CBI flags lapses in NEET paper preparation in NTA office

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: The CBI has flagged a series of profoundly prosaic security lapses in NEET-UG 2026, underlining the absence of frisking and checking in the "confidential section" of the NTA, lack of proper CCTV monitoring of the place and the involvement of the same set of people for different stages of paper finalisation, officials said.

In its 94-page chargesheet filed before a special court here, the CBI said the agency red-flagged the lack of compartmentalisation in the National Testing Agency's (NTA) workflow, allowing a person to get access to the complete final papers for the medical exam National Eligibility and Entrance Test (NEET).

The workflow involved four crucial stages -- item writing, moderation, vetting and translation.

First, at the item writing stage, experts are called in to provide questions and answers, not knowing if their contributions will be in the final paper.

It is followed by moderation, where some experts are called to select the questions for four sets to be prepared for NTA with uniform difficulty, in which they have to finalise 45 questions for each set -- a total of 180 questions.

Next comes vetting, wherein the subject experts solve the question sets finalised by moderators. It is then checked if the answers proposed by vetters and moderators match. In case of dispute, the NTA director sits with moderators and vetters and solves the issue.

The finalised question sets are translated into vernacular languages by subject experts, and the translated versions are then reverse-translated into English by subject experts to verify accuracy and ensure no context is lost in translation.

Ideally, the above steps should be done by distinct experts handling each phase to prevent any single individual from grasping the (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Assam Police raids illegal slaughterhouse, one held: CM

GUWAHATI, Aug 7: Police raided an illegal slaughterhouse in Assam's Nagaon district on Friday and arrested one person, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Several cattle and buffaloes, along with suspected beef, were also seized in the operation.

"In an early morning operation in Nagaon, @assampolice busted an illegal slaughterhouse operated by Noor Ali and Noor Zaman, seizing 285 kg of suspected beef, 36 cattle and 2 buffaloes," Sarma said in a post on X.

He said that one Asab Ali has been arrested, while the other two accused are being "actively pursued".

The chief minister asserted that there is zero tolerance for illegal cattle smuggling and unlawful slaughter in the state, and those involved will face the full force of the law. (PTI)

India weathered Hormuz disruption without fuel shortages: Puri

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: India successfully shielded consumers from supply disruptions triggered by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz earlier this year through diversified sourcing, expanded refining capacity and higher domestic production, Oil minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Friday, while outlining the government's broader strategy to strengthen the country's energy security.

Addressing an industry event organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Puri said India had moved beyond viewing energy security solely through the lens of access to hydrocarbons, citing diversified imports, strategic partnerships, infrastructure expansion and alternative fuels as key pillars of its approach.

"Today, I think we are in the happy situation of being able to say that, as far as India is concerned, we have moved on from that," he said.

He said India maintained uninterrupted fuel supplies despite dis-



ruptions to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a key global energy transit route. The Iran war disrupted energy supplies through the strait. Pre-war, India imported as much as half its crude oil from countries using the strait as a transit. Also, 90 per cent of cooking gas LPG and 60 per cent of gas imports passed through the strait.

These supplies were disrupted, but India diversified its sources to prevent any dryout anywhere in the country.

"I can say with a degree of con-

fidence, not one station went dry, not one," Puri said, referring to the country's network of more than 1,07,000 fuel retail outlets.

According to Puri, India expanded its crude supply sources from 27 to 41 countries, increased its fuel retail network from about 52,000 outlets in 2014 to around 1,07,000 currently, and broadened city gas distribution coverage from 55 geographical areas to 309.

The minister said domestic LPG production was increased to offset lower imports from Gulf suppliers affected by the disruption.

"We never ran short of crude oil supplies. We always had about 60 days (cover); there was no shortage," he said.

Puri also said the US had emerged as India's largest supplier of LPG following the disruption.

"Today, I am happy to inform you that the United States accounts for something like 67 per cent of our LPG imports."

Looking beyond the immediate supply (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

No salary uncertainty for regularised SSA teachers, says Ranoj Pegu

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, Aug 7: Assam Education Minister Ranoj Pegu on Friday assured teachers regularised under the Special Recruitment Drive (SRD) from Samagra Shiksha Assam (SSA) that there is no uncertainty over their salaries, saying the delay in disbursement this month is temporary and payments will be credited within the next two days.

The assurance came after the minister held a meeting with representatives of the SRD Teachers' Welfare Forum and the All Assam Primary Teachers' Association, who had raised concerns over the delay in salary payments following their regularisation as government employees.

Pegu said the delay was the result of procedural changes introduced under the state's financial reforms and not due to any issue relating to the teachers' employment or salary entitlement.

"There is no problem regarding the salaries of these teachers. Although there has been a slight delay

this month, they will receive their salaries within the next two days," the minister said.

He explained that the salary disbursement mechanism has been shifted as part of the government's treasury reforms, adding that all service benefits available to regular government employees would continue unchanged.

According to the minister, the regularised teachers have now been integrated into the FinAssam portal, which will serve as the platform for salary payments and other service-related transactions. Earlier, their salaries were released through the respective district treasuries, but this month's payment will be processed through the Dispur Treasury as part of the transition to the revised financial system.

Pegu clarified that neither the salary head nor the service conditions of the teachers have been altered after their regularisation.

He said that after completing their tenure under Samagra Shiksha, the teachers have joined the Assam (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Ties with Pakistan can only move ahead in environment free of terror, hostility: Govt tells LS

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: Relations with Pakistan can only progress in an "environment free of terror, hostility and violence," however, the neighbouring nation continues to use "terrorism as an instrument of state policy" against India, the Centre informed Parliament on Friday.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said this while responding to Samajwadi Party MP Dharmendra Yadav's query on the present status of relations between India and Pakistan since the Pulwama terror attack, along with the changes that have taken place at the political, diplomatic and trade level between the two countries.

"It is government's firm position that India's relations with Pakistan can only move ahead in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence. However, Pakistan continues to follow the policy of cross-border terrorism and using terrorism as an instrument of state policy against India," the EAM said in a written response in the Lok Sabha.

Following the Pulwama terror attack in 2019, India withdrew Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to Pakistan, and hiked customs duty on all goods originating in or exported from Pakistan to 200 per cent, he said.

Pakistan, subsequently, announced certain unilateral measures, including downgrading of diplomatic rela-

tions and suspension of bilateral trade with India, the government said.

In response to the Pahalgam terror attack perpetrated by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists on April 22, 2025, India took a number of diplomatic steps, including placing the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance, closing the check-post in Attari, restricting visas, and downsizing diplomatic and official presence at the respective Missions, Jaishankar said.

"Military action targeting terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir was also undertaken. At present, India and Pakistan maintain their respective diplomatic Missions in each other's capital," he added.

Both sides continue to have functional engagements, including DGMO-level talks, exchange of pre-notifications of flight testing of ballistic missiles, and the sharing of lists of nuclear installations and prisoners in each other's custody, the Union minister said.

The minister was also asked the number of bilateral talks held between India and Pakistan at various levels during the last five years along with the issues discussed therein and whether the government "still maintains that normal bilateral relations" with Pakistan are not possible until cross-border terrorism ends. "India has made clear its (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: One in five Indians on an average will be over the age of 60, with nearly seven in 10 older adults living in rural India, a study showed on Friday.

The study released by Transform Rural India (TRI) said India is growing old before it grows rich, unlike many developed nations that became wealthy before their populations aged.

The number of working-age adults available to support each older person is projected to decline from 8.4 in 2001 to an average of 5.2 by 2026, the study said.

Titled 'Demographic Transition, Evolving Families and the Future of the Care Ecosystem in Rural India', the white paper was released in connection with the TRI's India Rural Colloquy (IRC).

"By 2050, one in five Indians -- around 347 million people -- will be over the age of 60, with nearly seven in 10 older adults living in



rural India. Unlike many developed nations that became wealthy before their populations aged, India is undergoing this demographic transition at much lower income levels," the study said.

Drawing on data from the National Family Health Survey

(NFHS), Longitudinal Ageing Study in India, Census projections, Time Use Surveys and other national datasets, the white paper said India's traditional family-based care model is under increasing strain as families are smaller than before, younger generations are

leaving for work and people are living longer.

"Yet nearly 94 per cent of care for older people is still provided within households, leaving fewer family members to meet growing and increasingly complex care needs," it added.

Women spend around 305 minutes every day on unpaid care work, compared with 56 minutes by men, the study said, adding that this unequal distribution of unpaid care remains one of the biggest barriers to improving women's labour force participation.

It also noted that climate change is worsening the situation, with heatwaves and floods adding significantly to women's unpaid work.

Around two-thirds of all deaths in India are now due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Stock markets decline dragged by banks, elevated crude oil prices

MUMBAI, Aug 7: Market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Friday after two days of gains, dragged down by bank, financial stocks, and crude oil prices trading above USD 80 per barrel mark.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 455.59 points, or 0.58 per cent, to settle at 78,499.17. During the day, it tanked 577.69 points, or 0.73 per cent, to 78,377.07.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dipped 65.35 points, or 0.27 per cent, to end at 24,570.65. Intra-day, it declined 113.25 points, or 0.45 per cent, to 24,522.75.

From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finance tanked 5.90 per cent and Bajaj Finserv was down 4.18 per cent. ICICI Bank, Trent, Axis Bank, and Asian Paints were also among the laggards. Tata Consultancy Services, Mahindra & Mahindra, State Bank of India, and Tech Mahindra were among the winners. "Financial stocks bore the brunt of the selling after the Reserve Bank of India released a draft framework proposing tighter norms for certain revolving credit products offered by non-bank financial companies (NBFCs). Bajaj Finance plunged 5.9 per cent, while Bajaj Finserv and other lending stocks also came under pressure as investors assessed the potential impact on future loan growth, product flexibility, and profitability," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Bajaj Finance tumbled 5.90 per cent to end at ₹ 1,082, while Bajaj Finserv declined 4.18 per cent to ₹



2,001.90.

"Indian equities ended lower on Friday as a sharp sell-off in financial stocks, lingering uncertainty over a lasting peace agreement in the Middle East and investor caution ahead of the closely watched US non-farm payrolls report weighed on market sentiment," Hariselman Radhakrishnan, Founder & CEO of HST Wealth, a Research Analyst firm, said. Shares of Bajaj Finance and Bajaj Finserv were among the biggest drags on the benchmark indices, with selling pressure spreading across the broader NBFC space as investors assessed the potential implications of proposed regulatory changes, he added.

The BSE SmallCap Select index went up by 0.20 per cent and Mid-Cap Select index edged higher by 0.19 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, financial services dropped 1.33 per cent, private banks index (1.04 per cent),

top 10 banks (0.97 per cent), consumer durables (0.90 per cent), housing finance (0.81 per cent), bankex (0.61 per cent) and insurance (0.61 per cent).

Focused IT jumped 1.44 per cent, auto (1.33 per cent), IT (1.16 per cent), PSU bank (0.76 per cent) and healthcare (0.50 per cent).

This week, the BSE benchmark climbed 404.53 points, or 0.51 per cent, and the Nifty went up by 187.05 points, or 0.76 per cent.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dipped 0.35 per cent to USD 82.20 per barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 17.86 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

"Indian equity markets ended modestly lower on Friday as renewed uncertainty surrounding the Strait of Hormuz negotiations and broad-based weakness in financial stocks overshadowed an otherwise supportive earnings backdrop.

"Investor sentiment remained cautious as markets weighed geopolitical risks alongside the potential implications of fresh regulatory proposals for the non-bank lending sector," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

For the entire week, both benchmark indices faced divergence after stock exchanges introduced a new auction mechanism for shares having futures and options (F&O) contracts. The closing auction session in the equity cash segment became operational on Monday, introducing a new auction-based mechanism for determining the closing prices of eligible stocks in a move aimed at making the price discovery process more transparent and robust.

"Market sentiment remains measured as the absence of a definitive geopolitical resolution in the Middle East continues to keep crude oil prices volatile," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

In Asian markets, South Korea's KOSPI and Japan's Nikkei 225 index ended lower, while Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index settled higher.

Markets in Europe were trading in positive territory. US markets ended lower on Thursday.

On Thursday, the Sensex climbed 373.76 points, or 0.48 per cent, to settle at 78,954.76. The Nifty traded in a narrow range for the day and edged marginally higher by 11.35 points, or 0.05 per cent, to end at 24,636. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Assam flood situation

Guwahati-Ledo-Guwahati Intercity Express, Lumding-Tinsukia-Lumding DEMU and Tinsukia-Jorhat Town Passenger, will run via Moranhat. The long-distance trains will continue to operate on the diverted route via North Lakhimpur-Rangapara-North Rangia for the time being.

In addition, special trains are also being operated regularly throughout the disruption period to provide alternative rail connectivity for passengers travelling to and from Upper Assam, the NFR said. (PTI)

Assam govt to

will reopen from August 10, and in case of students of schools which have suffered major flood damage, they will be tagged with other nearby schools for the time being. An amount of ₹ 2 lakh each to the affected schools in the worst-hit districts has already been disbursed to undertake cleaning and repair activities, he said.

Sarma also added that funds announced for providing free school uniforms and book grant have also been disbursed. (PTI)

Oppn cannot dictate

fewer because of the disruptions," he told reporters. The minister clarified that there is no question of a special session while Parliament is already in session.

"There is no proposal for a special session. The Monsoon session is currently underway. How can we talk about a special session while the current session is still in progress?" he said.

Rejecting the opposition's claims over Shah's non-participation in Parliament, Rijiju said Shah remains in the Parliament complex from morning till late at night and accused the opposition of indulging in "drama" over the issue. "The home minister remains in Parliament from morning till late at night. There should not be any drama over this. I have said this in the House as well," he said.

The minister asserted that under the principle of collective responsibility, it is for the government to decide which minister replies to a particular debate. The parliamentary affairs minister said the government decides the appropriate time for Shah to intervene in Parliament.

"Whenever Home Minister Amit Shah speaks, it will be on the relevant issue at the right time. The opposition cannot demand that any minister should come and speak on a particular day. They cannot direct the Chair. They can only make a request," he said. He said the government has several important bills lined up, including legislation relating to tribunals and mines and minerals.

"Every bill is important for the government and every bill is a priority. Which bill is to be brought at what time and on which day, I cannot definitely say," he said.

Rijiju also accused the Congress of opposing delimitation and women's reservation.

"Delimitation and women's reservation are very important issues. The Congress opposes both," he said.

This is a betrayal of the women of the country, Rijiju charged. "Our commitment is known to everyone. The prime minister has repeatedly said that we will ensure women get their rights. The Congress continues to oppose it and will have to face the charge of being anti-women," he said. (PTI)

CBI flags lapses

exam's full scope, officials said. "However, in the process actually followed for the NEET UG 2026 examination, it is found that many experts have been involved in multiple stages. Further, from the moderation step onwards, the experts concerned have full access to final sets of questions.

"This is particularly so in the translation/back-translation stage, as here a single expert can see all four of the final master sets," the agency alleged.

In its investigation, the CBI has chronicled the startlingly porous environment in 'The Confidential Section' of NTA that operates from an entire wing of the first floor of the NSIC building in Okhla, where question papers for the high-stakes undergraduate medical course admission are prepared.

The NTA maintained "no practice of checking or frisking of experts" as they entered or exited the confidential section, the agency has alleged. This absence of such a basic security detail allowed Chemistry expert P V Kulkarni to transcribe 135 questions onto "small chits of paper" and smuggle them to his hotel room "unnoticed" for three days while he was working there, it alleged.

The three accused lecturers -- Kulkarni for Chemistry, Manisha Gurunath Mandhare for Zoology and Botany, and Manisha Sanjay Havaldar for Physics -- on the NTA panel allegedly exploited the loopholes in the workflow of the paper finalisation and managed to recreate the final paper with unprecedented accuracy, which they shared with a close group of students for a substantial financial consideration.

These questions were allegedly accessed by a beautician Manisha Waghmare who planted some students in these special classes of Kulkarni and Mandhare. By using the notebooks of these students, she also created a question paper which she sold through a series of middlemen. One such paper landed in the hands of an aspirant who complained about the paper leak to the NTA, the CBI has alleged in the charge sheet.

The CBI found that Mandhare, who was working as an English-to-Marathi translator for Botany and a back translator for Zoology, after finishing her work for the day and upon returning to the hotel room, would mark the relevant paragraphs in the NCERT textbooks. "Due to her decades of experience with the same material, she was easily able to correlate the questions with the NCERT textbook material. Accused Manisha Gurunath Mandhare attended the NTA NEET UG 2026 exam translation and back translation related work of Botany and Zoology between March 9 and April 5," it said. The agency also found that Havaldar used to note down the questions in brief after returning to her stay in Delhi at the end of the day's work.

A major oversight of the NTA flagged by the CBI is the lack of a dedicated, live-feed monitoring control room for its confidential wing, which allowed the activities in the confidential wing to proceed without interruption. This was compounded by the fact that CCTV footage of only 20-25 days was recorded and maintained by the NTA. "Since confidential section-related work of the NEET UG 2026 exam was completed on April 7 and the instant case was registered on May 12, no CCTV footage of the relevant period was available for investigation purposes. (PTI)

No salary uncertainty

government as regular employees and will continue to receive all benefits, privileges and service conditions applicable to permanent government staff. Appealing to teachers not to panic, the minister described the delay as a one-time issue linked to the migration of the payment process. He further added that once the transition is complete, salaries, pay slips and all other service-related processes will be handled through the FinAssam platform, ensuring timely monthly payments through the treasury system.

India weathered Hormuz

security, Puri highlighted the government's recently approved ₹ 84,000 crore Samudra Manthan programme aimed at supporting deep-water oil and gas exploration.

"The government is not going to do the drilling. The drilling is going to be done by private players," he said, adding that the government would support up to 50 per cent of drilling costs or up to Rs 650 crore per well to encourage investment in high-risk offshore exploration.

Puri said India had opened previously restricted offshore acreage for exploration and expected further opportunities under future licensing rounds. He also highlighted the government's push to expand compressed biogas capacity and said India's ethanol blending programme continued to make progress.

Turning to recent concerns over ethanol-blended petrol, Puri dismissed suggestions of widespread fuel contamination, saying oil marketing companies had launched large-scale testing before complaints surfaced publicly. "They found four cases out of 1,07,000 petrol pumps with six crores to seven crores consumers going every day. So obviously, someone out there is trying to place some things out of context."

Puri said inspection teams carried out extensive checks across the country. He argued that contamination incidents could occur in any fuel or product, but said the findings did not indicate a systemic issue.

The minister also defended the government's fuel pricing policy, saying excise duty reductions had helped cushion consumers from global volatility.

"In the last four years, if you look at an overall period, prices in India have largely come down. Why? Because the central government, thanks to very bold decision-making by the Prime Minister, decided to cut excise duty on fuel on three occasions in November 21, May 2022, and March 10, 2026."

He added that while retail petrol and diesel prices had risen modestly over a longer period, excise duty reductions had more than offset those increases. "Yes, if you look at a slightly larger period, I think petrol prices went up by 4 or 5 per cent... But, if you compare that with the amount of excise duty cut, ₹ 10 per litre on petrol and diesel, that's why India has one of the most affordable fuel rates in the world."

The minister cautioned that ongoing geopolitical conflicts continued to cloud the global energy outlook despite improvements in supply resilience. "I think the new global order should be secure, smart, and sustainable."

He said India has so far been able to insulate itself from external shocks, but warned that geopolitical uncertainty remained. "So, I think we've managed so far. I don't like sticking my neck out too much because the global turmoil is still going on, but I am confident that with the policies we put in place, we are reasonably confident of meeting those challenges. But the rest, of course, we will have to navigate." (PTI)

Ties with Pakistan

approach of responding appropriately against cross-border terrorism and its infrastructure, not tolerating any form of blackmail and taking comprehensive steps to protect its citizens. These considerations shape India's conviction that normal bilateral relations require an end to cross-border terrorism," he said. (PTI)

India to grow old

cancer, while a growing share of the disease burden comes from years lived with disability rather than premature death, according to the study. The white paper said India's healthcare system was largely designed around episodic interventions such as childbirth, immunisation and acute illnesses. "The next phase of healthcare is about supporting people living with chronic illnesses, disabilities and the challenges of ageing -- something hospitals alone cannot do," it added. TRI recommends 'neighbourhood of care' model to link existing rural institutions, including Gram Panchayats, self-help groups, ASHAs, Anganwadi centres and Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, into a single community care network. The model seeks to make integrated care available within walking distance of every household, with the white paper saying rural India does not need to build new care infrastructure but connect the institutions it already has.

The white paper also positioned care as an economic opportunity, estimating that investing 2 per cent of India's GDP in the care economy could generate around 11 million jobs, largely for rural women.

"India has made remarkable progress in helping people survive. The next challenge is ensuring they can live well for longer. Our demographic transition requires us to redesign care delivery itself -- beyond facility-based care, it will require to facilitate as shared community function and improving sustainable living conditions," said Shyamal Santra, practice director, Transform Rural India. "The institutions needed to make this possible already exist across rural India. By connecting them through a common care mandate, an eco-system needs to be built that supports families, caregivers, strengthens local governance and prepares villages for the decades ahead," Santra added. (PTI)

SBI Q1 profit up 14 pc to ₹ 24,113 cr

MUMBAI, Aug 7: State Bank of India on Friday reported 13.73 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at ₹ 24,113 crore for June quarter as core income increased and provisions fell.

On a standalone basis, the country's largest lender's net profit grew 10.23 per cent on-year to ₹ 21,121.22 crore as against ₹ 19,160.44 crore in April-June 2025.

Chairman C S Setty said the bank is aiming for a 14-15 per cent rise in advances for the fiscal as against earlier expectation of 13-15 per cent.

In the June quarter, its core net interest income rose nearly 15 per cent to ₹ 46,992 crore on the back of a 18.63 per cent rise in gross advances, while the domestic net interest margin contracted to 3 per cent. (PTI)

WGC unveils roadmap to position gold as strategic driver of Viksit Bharat

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 7: The World Gold Council (WGC) on Friday unveiled "Swarnim Udaan 2047: Unlocking the Full Potential of Gold Towards Viksit Bharat 2047," a vision document outlining a long-term roadmap to position gold as a strategic national asset capable of strengthening India's economic growth, financial resilience and global competitiveness.

Prepared in collaboration with Monitor Deloitte as the knowledge partner, the report envisages a greater role for the gold sector as India works towards becoming a US\$30 trillion economy by 2047.

It calls for coordinated policy reforms and institutional support to unlock value across the country's gold ecosystem.

Launching the report, David Tait, Chief Executive Officer of the World Gold Council, said India already occupies a central position in the global gold market and is poised to play an even more significant role as global supply chains and financial markets evolve.

He said gold today extends beyond jewellery and investment, serving as an important resource for industrial innovation, financial resilience and economic security.

Sachin Jain, Regional CEO (India), World Gold Council, said gold has long been embedded in India's cultural and economic fabric and the report seeks to unlock its potential as a strategic national asset aligned with the country's development priorities.

LG unveils 2026 AI TV lineup

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 7: LG Electronics India Ltd on Friday unveiled its 2026 AI television lineup, expanding its premium TV portfolio with a strong focus on ultra-large screens and Mini LED technology, led by a 292 cm (115-inch) QNED evo Mini LED flagship, the largest Mini LED television introduced by the company in the Indian market.

The new range comprises 25 ultra-large models measuring 190 cm (75 inches) and above across four display technologies—QNED evo Mini LED, OLED evo, Micro RGB evo/Mini RGB evo and Nano 4K UHD.

The lineup integrates AI-powered picture processing, personalised smart features, immersive audio and enhanced gaming capabilities.

Brian Jung, Director, Media Entertainment Solution, LG Electronics India, said growing consumer demand for larger screens for OTT streaming, live sports and gaming had driven the company's premium TV strategy.

NABARD celebrates National Handloom Day, honours Assam's master weavers

Exhibition showcases traditional handloom products, highlights rural livelihoods and women's empowerment



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 7: The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) on Friday celebrated National Handloom Day by honouring Assam's weaving community and organising a day-long exhibition-cum-sale of traditional handloom products at the NEDFi Conference Hall in Dispur.

The programme was attended by Secretary, North Eastern Council (NEC), Satinder Kumar Bhalla, as the chief guest.

Secretary and Director of Agriculture, Government of Assam, Dr P Uday Praveen and Executive Director of NEDFi Lemli Loyi were among the distinguished guests.

Addressing the gathering, G Ramesh Kumar, Chief General Manager, NABARD Assam Regional Office, highlighted the crucial role of the handloom sector in empowering women, generating rural livelihoods and strengthening the state's economy.

He also outlined NABARD's initiatives to promote sustainable growth of the sector.

In his address, Bhalla recalled the historical significance of National Handloom Day and lauded NABARD's role in supporting the handloom sector and rural development. He highlighted the vision of achieving handloom and handicraft exports worth ₹5,000 crore by 2030, training and upskilling more than 50,000 artisans, and establishing over 30 Common Facility Centres to improve production capacity and design quality.

He stressed the need to enhance the scale, quality and competitiveness of the sector to contribute to the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

On the occasion, noted entrepreneur and Assamese costume designer Garima Saikia Garg and three successful handloom weavers were felicitated for their outstanding contribution to Assam's handloom sector.

Sharing her experiences, Garg offered practical guidance to weavers and artisans on improving product quality, design and marketability.

To mark the occasion, NABARD also set up 12 exhibition stalls showcasing traditional handloom products crafted by artisans and weavers from different parts of Assam.

The exhibition attracted a large number of visitors and provided participants with an opportunity to promote their products, expand market access and interact directly with consumers.

INTERLOCKING OF 03 NOS LC GATES

E-Tender Notice No. N-2026-27-TSK-NIT-07 Dated: 01-08-2026. Works tenders through "E" Tendering system for and on behalf of the president of India are invited for the works as detailed below:- **Tender No. N-2026-27-TSK-T-07. Name of work:** Interlocking of 03 nos. LC gates viz SM/4, SM/18 & ST/109 with associated works of Tinsukia Division in N.F. Railway. **Tender Value:** ₹3,50,54,929.28/- **Earnest Money:** ₹7,01,100/- **Date & time of closing of tender:** At 15.00 hrs. & opening at 24-08-2026 after closing. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available in the website www.ireps.gov.in

ELECTRICAL WORKS IN LUMDING DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: Sr. DEE/LMG/16 of 2026-27. **Dated:** 04-08-2026. **E-Tender** are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Tender No.:** EL-LM-26-27-17. **Name of work:** (A) Provision of construction of RPF barrack at Haibargaon (20 Bedded capacity). (Electric portion) (B) Badarpur SDRH: Upgradation of OPD, minor OT, Consultation Rooms, Toilet complex, etc. including electrical works at IPD & OPD. (Electric General Service Portion) (C) Construction of multi-storied hostel for MDTI of Lumding Near Children Park under Jurisdiction of ADEN/II/Lumding (Electric Portion). (D) Construction of additional 20 bedded RCC Building, Loco Running Room at Badarpur. (Electrical portion). **Tender Value:** ₹87,21,881.32/- **Earnest Money:** ₹1,74,400/- **Date & time of closing of tender at 11:00 hrs. and opening at 11:30 hrs. on 28-08-2026.** Complete information alongwith the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 11:00 hrs. on 28-08-2026 in the website www.ireps.gov.in **Sr. DEE (G&Chg), Lumding**

E-AUCTION PROGRAMME FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST 2026

E-auction programme for sale of Railway Scrap materials under jurisdiction of Tinsukia Division for the month of AUGUST 2026 is hereby fixed as under:

SN	MONTH	DATE FIXED
		14/08/2026 & 28/08/2026 for GSD/Dibrugarh Town &
1	AUGUST/2026	12/08/2026 & 26/08/2026 for Tinsukia Division

Interested bidders may participate in E-auction through IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in

Dy. Chief Materials Manager/Dibrugarh
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with a smile

Rajior Dal chief alleges political favouritism, irregularities in Sivasagar and Charaideo

Assam flood: Akhil Gogoi demands removal of Bimal Borah over relief

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, Aug 7: Rajior Dal president and MLA Akhil Gogoi on Friday demanded the removal of Assam Minister Bimal Borah as the guardian minister of Sivasagar, alleging widespread irregularities and political favouritism in the distribution of flood relief in Sivasagar and Charaideo districts.

Addressing a press conference, Gogoi claimed that the relief exercise had been marred by discrimination, with several genuine flood-affected families allegedly excluded from government assistance while many ineligible beneficiaries received relief.

He alleged that BJP leaders remained absent during the initial days of the floods when local residents were struggling with the crisis.

According to Gogoi, Rajior Dal workers were actively engaged in rescue and relief efforts at that stage, while BJP functionaries joined relief operations only after



these activities began attracting public attention.

The Rajior Dal leader further accused Minister Bimal Borah of allowing relief materials to be distributed through BJP workers and party-affiliated ward members instead of following a transparent and impartial process.

Gogoi also alleged that a BJP ward member misappropriated re-

lief supplies meant for flood victims.

He claimed that despite local residents exposing the alleged irregularity, no action was initiated against the accused.

Instead, he alleged, the individual who highlighted the matter was arrested.

Questioning the implementation of the state's flood relief pro-

gramme, Gogoi alleged that political considerations had influenced the selection of beneficiaries in Sivasagar and Charaideo.

He claimed that many deserving families had not received the Rs 15,000 financial assistance announced by the Assam government for flood-affected households.

Maintaining that similar complaints had surfaced from several other flood-hit districts, Gogoi urged Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to ensure that beneficiary lists are prepared by neutral authorities, including village headmen, ward members or government officials, instead of political party workers.

Holding Bimal Borah directly responsible for the alleged lapses in Sivasagar and Charaideo, Gogoi demanded his immediate removal as guardian minister and called on the state government to conduct a transparent and impartial distribution of flood relief among all eligible beneficiaries.

Seeks 10,000 crore relief package, high-level probe into cause of floods ATASU blames Sivasagar, Charaideo administrations for flood tragedy

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Aug 7: The All Tai Ahom Students' Union (ATASU) on Friday held the Sivasagar and Charaideo district administrations responsible for their alleged failure to alert residents ahead of the devastating floods that claimed several lives and caused widespread destruction in the two districts.

Addressing a press conference here, ATASU president Basanta Gogoi alleged that the administrations failed to issue timely warnings despite indications of an impending disaster.

He claimed that more than 80 per cent of the affected areas in the two districts remained inundated and questioned who would compensate people for the psychological trauma caused by the disaster.

Gogoi alleged that the Deputy Commissioner of Nagaland's Mon district had informed the Sivasagar District Commissioner about the existence of 60 coal mining sites in the district.

According to him, the water level of the Dikhow river rose



sharply in the Santak and Bihubor areas bordering Mon district on the morning of July 19, submerging Nepalkhuti by around 11 am.

He claimed that while the Mon district administration issued a red alert anticipating a major flood, the Sivasagar and Charaideo administrations failed to issue any such warning.

He alleged that by evening, floodwaters had inundated Nazira, Bamunbari, Holongkakoti and ad-

joining areas, causing extensive damage.

Gogoi claimed that the three-hour window between the initial rise in water level and the onset of severe flooding could have been used to alert residents and reduce casualties.

The ATASU leader also criticised the Assam Government, alleging that it had failed to implement recommendations of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to install automatic sluice gates to manage backflow from the Brahmaputra.

He further alleged that the government had not effectively implemented the Flood Plains Zoning Act, 2022, which, according to him, could have curtailed stone quarrying in the Dikhow riverbed.

Demanding a 10,000 crore flood relief and rehabilitation package, Gogoi also called for a high-level inquiry into the causes of the recent floods.

He warned that ATASU would launch a mass movement if its demands were not met.

Dima Hasao observes 12th National Handloom Day



HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, Aug 7: The 12th National Handloom Day was observed with enthusiasm in Dima Hasao on Friday, with the Handloom and Textiles Department organising a programme at the office premises of the Additional Director of Handloom and Textiles in Haflong.

Additional Director of Sericulture Naren Malakar attended the programme as the chief guest, while officials, weavers and other dignitaries were also present.

As part of the celebrations, the department felicitated local handloom weavers in recognition of their contribution to the socio-economic development of the region.

An exhibition featuring handloom products created by more than 100 weavers was also organised.

Addressing the gathering, Mayuri Killingpi, in-charge Additional Director of Handloom and Textiles, highlighted the history of India's handloom sector and its significance during the country's freedom movement.

In his address, chief guest Naren Malakar said Assam is one of the few states renowned for its rich indigenous handloom tradition.

He also emphasised the close relationship between sericulture and the handloom sector and stressed the need to preserve and promote both for sustainable livelihoods.

The programme also featured interactions with successful weavers, who shared their experiences and journeys in the handloom sector, inspiring aspiring artisans and highlighting the importance of preserving traditional weaving practices.

Modern English School hosts Kuladhar Das Scholars' Summit 2026

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 7: Modern English School, Kahilipara organised the second edition of the Kuladhar Das Scholars' Summit 2026, an inter-school competition aimed at fostering critical thinking, research and intellectual discourse among students on Friday.

Instituted in memory of the school's founder, Late Kuladhar Das, the summit brought together students from leading schools across the region to participate in competitions focused on contemporary issues, analytical thinking and public speaking.

The programme began with the felicitation of the judges, followed by an inaugural address by the Principal of Modern English School, Jonali Das, who encouraged students to embrace inquiry, innovation and dialogue as essential qualities of future leaders.

The summit featured three competitions—a Panel Discussion on "Codification vs Pluralism", a Paper Presentation on "The Architecture of Modern Inflation" and a Symposium on "Epistemology, Media & the Post-Truth Era".

Participants presented research-based arguments and explored contemporary legal, economic and media-related issues.

The competitions were judged by Dr

Pankaj Jyoti Gogoi, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Arya Vidyapeeth College; Dr Chandrababha Bohra, Assistant Professor, KC Das Commerce College and Dr Muktitam Hazarika, Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Cotton University.

The event witnessed participation from St Francis D'Assisi High School, Boragaon; Brahmaputra Valley English Academy, Bonga; St Francis De Sales Higher Secondary School, Satgaon; St Vivekananda English Academy, Maligaon; Maria Public School, Birkuchi; Modern English School, Kahilipara and Gurukul Grammar Senior Secondary School, Geetanagar.

Speaking on the occasion, Principal Jonali Das said the summit reflected the school's vision of nurturing inquisitive minds capable of engaging with complex global issues through research and informed discussion.

During the prize distribution ceremony, Pankaj Das, Director of Modern English School, congratulated the winners and encouraged participants to continue pursuing academic excellence and lifelong learning.

In the Paper Presentation category, Samiksha Phukan of Gurukul Grammar Senior Secondary School won the Best Paper Award,

while Aarohee Kalita of Brahmaputra Valley English Academy received the Best Presentation Award.

Sayan Ghosh of Modern English School won the Innovation Award, and Neeraj Sarma of St Vivekananda English Academy received the Young Researcher's Award.

In the Panel Discussion, Dhritimita Rabha of Modern English School was adjudged Best Panelist, while Mansun Thakuria of Brahmaputra Valley English Academy received the Influential Interlocutor Award.

Special Jury Mention awards went to Ankan Bhatta of Gurukul Grammar Senior Secondary School and Bhargav Bora of St. Francis D'Assisi High School.

In the Symposium, Moucham Sarma of St Vivekananda English Academy secured the Best Presentation Award, Dhritimoni Sarma of Brahmaputra Valley English Academy was declared runner-up and Kavyapriya Das of Modern English School received the Special Jury Award.

Certificates of participation were presented to all participants.

The organisers said the summit reaffirmed the school's commitment to promoting interdisciplinary learning, academic curiosity and leadership among students.

Lightning strikes Tezpur hotel; guest escapes unhurt

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Aug 7: A hotel guest had a narrow escape after lightning struck a hotel in Tezpur late on Thursday night, damaging electrical equipment at the establishment and in several nearby business premises.

The incident occurred around midnight amid heavy rainfall when lightning struck the outer wall of Room No 101 on the first floor of Hotel Park in the heart of the town.

The impact shattered part of the concrete structure and sent sparks into the room. The guest staying in the room escaped unhurt.

Hotel authorities said the building was equipped with lightning protection measures. However, the intensity of the strike split a concrete pillar of the hotel's boundary wall, causing sparks to spread into the building and leaving staff and guests shocked.

The lightning strike damaged 12 ceiling fans, a generator and several other electrical appliances within the hotel.

Nearby commercial establishments also reported damage to electrical equipment following the incident.

No injuries were reported apart from the property damage.

NFR restores Simaluguri rail link in 17 days, resumes partial train services

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 7: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has restored the flood-damaged railway tracks at Simaluguri and adjoining areas in Sivasagar district within 17 days, enabling the phased resumption of train services in the affected section.

The restoration was completed under the Tinsukia Division despite adverse weather conditions and extensive flooding, with train operations resuming under enhanced safety measures.

NFR said diesel locomotive-hauled trains would initially operate on the restored section as many flood-affected families, along with their belongings and livestock, continue to take shelter on or near the railway tracks.

The temporary arrangement has been made to eliminate the risk of electrocution from overhead electric lines until the situation normalises.

Local train services, including Train No. 15669 Guwahati-Dibrugarh Nagaland Express, Train Nos 15603/15604 Guwahati-Ledo-Guwahati Intercity Express, Train

Nos 15967/15968 Rangiya-Ledo-Rangiya Intercity Express, Train Nos 75601/75602 Lumding-Tinsukia-Lumding DEMU and Train No 55914 Tinsukia-Jorhat Town Passenger, among others, will continue to operate via Moranhat.

Long-distance trains will continue to run on the diverted route via North Lakhimpur, Rangapara North and Rangiya until normal operations are fully restored.

NFR said special trains would also continue to operate to maintain connectivity with Upper Assam during the disruption period.

The restoration work involved the deployment of more than 700 personnel working round the clock with heavy machinery, engineering equipment and relief materials under the supervision of senior officials from the NFR headquarters and Tinsukia Division.

NFR said the coordinated effort enabled the damaged railway infrastructure to be restored safely and efficiently and reaffirmed its commitment to restoring normal train operations at the earliest while ensuring the safety of passengers and flood-affected residents.

Flood-hit families allege irregularities in 15,000 relief distribution

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Aug 7: Allegations of irregularities in the distribution of the Assam Government's 15,000 interim flood assistance surfaced in Borderoi near Demow, where flood-affected residents staged a protest on Thursday night, claiming that several genuine beneficiaries had been excluded from the scheme.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had on August 3 launched the first phase of the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) of 15,000 as interim flood relief for affected families from the Dibrugarh Secretariat.

According to local sources, several families of Athabari Tea Estate's Borderoi branch, whose houses were inundated following the rise in the Deroi river, did not receive the first instalment of the financial assistance.

Protesting residents gathered outside the residence of the local ward member on Thursday night, alleging irregularities in the preparation of the beneficiary list.

The protesters claimed that several families whose houses were severely affected by the floods had been deprived of the interim assistance, while some households that were reportedly not affected by the floods had received the 15,000 relief amount.

The aggrieved residents demanded that the beneficiary list be reviewed and corrected to ensure that all genuine flood-affected families receive the government assistance.

BTC celebrates National Handloom Day, honours weavers at Mushalpur

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Aug 7: The Handloom and Textiles Department of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) on Friday celebrated the 12th National Handloom Day at the Cultural Complex in Mushalpur, highlighting Bodoland's rich weaving heritage and recognising the contribution of handloom artisans.

BTC Executive Member for Handloom and Textiles Maheswar Basumatary attended the programme as the chief guest.

Executive Member Augusta Tigga, MLAs Thaneswar Basumatary and Maneswar Brahma, MCLAs Arjun Daimary and Ridip Kumar Deka, former Executive Member Rwisumwi Basumatary, former MCLA Moonsing Brahma, government officials, master weavers, representatives of Primary Weavers' Co-operative Societies (PWCS) and artisans were also present.

The programme began with the inauguration of a handloom exhibition showcasing a variety of traditional handwoven products from across the Bodoland region.

Welcoming the gathering, Hand-

loom and Textiles Department Secretary Manas Das spoke on the significance of National Handloom Day and recalled the Swadeshi Movement of August 7, 1905, which inspired its observance.

Addressing the function, Maheswar Basumatary said National Handloom Day, observed since 2015, recognises the invaluable contribution of handloom weavers to India's textile heritage.

He said the occasion holds special significance in Bodoland, where weaving remains an integral part of the region's cultural identity, and urged the younger generation to carry forward the tradition.

He said the BTC Government is promoting locally woven handloom products by encouraging their use as official gifts and during government programmes.

He also announced that the Council is exploring the establishment of handloom emporiums at Bodoland Guest Houses to improve market access for local weavers.

Highlighting the growing global demand for sustainable and eco-friendly textiles, Basumatary said the trend presents new opportunities

for local artisans.

He also announced financial assistance of 10,000 each to 25 Primary Weavers' Co-operative Societies.

MLA Thaneswar Basumatary called for greater public support for locally woven products amid the growing use of machine-made textiles.

He emphasised the role of women in preserving the region's weaving tradition and urged consumers to purchase local handloom products.

MLA Maneswar Brahma stressed the need to train young weavers and continue government support to strengthen the handloom sector in the face of increasing competition from inexpensive imported products.

During the programme, 18 award-winning weavers were felicitated, while 25 Primary Weavers' Co-operative Societies were recognised for their contribution to the development of the handloom sector.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Hiranya Devi, CHD, Handloom and Textiles Department, BTC.

NFR revises train services as restoration continues on Lumding-Badarpur section

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 7: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced fresh changes to train services as restoration work continues near Harangajao station following the settlement of railway tracks on Lines 1 and 2 in the Lumding-Badarpur Hill Section.

Train operations are currently being maintained through Line-3 with enhanced safety measures while restoration work is underway.

According to NFR, six trains have been cancelled. These include Train No 15617 Guwahati-Dulabcherra Express scheduled to commence its journey on August 8, Train No 15618 Dulabcherra-Guwahati Express on August 9, Train No 15615 Guwahati-Silchar Express on August 8, Train No 15616 Silchar-Guwahati Express on August 9, Train No 15641 Silchar-New Tinsukia Express on August 8 and Train No 15642 New Tinsukia-Silchar Ex-



press on August 9.

NFR has also rescheduled six trains.

Train No 15650 Narangi-Agartala Express departing on August 8 will now leave at 10.30 pm, while Train No 15649 Agartala-Narangi Express will depart at 11.30 pm the same day.

Train No 15609 Guwahati-Sairang Express and Train No 15611 Rangiya-Silchar Express, both commencing their journeys on August 8, have also been rescheduled to depart at 11.30 pm.

Train No 15610 Sairang-Guwahati Express will depart at 9.30 pm on August 8, while Train No 15612 Silchar-Rangiya Express will leave at 5 am on August 9 instead of its scheduled timing.

Train No 15626 Agartala-Deogarh Express commencing its journey on August 8 has been rescheduled to depart at 11 pm.

NFR said the revised schedule has been implemented to facilitate restoration work while ensuring the safe movement of trains through the affected section.

Captive-bred vultures released into the wild for first time

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, Aug 7: Assam on Friday achieved a global conservation milestone with the release of captive-bred Slender-billed Vultures into the wild for the first time anywhere in the world. State Environment and Forest Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah released 10 captive-bred vultures—five Slender-billed Vultures and five White-rumped Vultures—from the Jatayu Soft Release Centre at Tewaripal in Biswanath district.

The facility is located adjacent to the sixth addition of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNP&TR).

The release has been carried out jointly by the Assam Forest Department and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), which have been working together on vulture conservation since 2007. The birds were introduced into the wild through the scientifically



managed soft release method.

The programme was attended by Biswanath MLA Pallab Lochan Das, Special Chief Secretary M Yadav, Chief Wildlife Warden Dr Vinay Gupta, Kaziranga National Park Director Dr C. Ramesh, Deputy Director of BNHS Dr Sachin Ranade, BNHS biologists Aniket Pawar and Gitartha Borah,

District Commissioner Karabi Karan Saikia, and other officials.

The dignitaries were welcomed by members of the Eco-Development Committee (EDC) and local residents.

Following the inaugural programme, the gate of the release aviary was opened remotely using a pulley system to avoid disturbing

the birds' natural behaviour.

The release was monitored from a CCTV-equipped observation tower.

Each of the released vultures has been fitted with a numbered blue leg ring and a back-mounted tag to facilitate monitoring after release.

Forest officials said the birds are expected to gradually integrate with existing wild vulture populations in the region.

Addressing the gathering, Jayanta Malla Baruah congratulated the Forest Department and BNHS for their long-term conservation efforts and highlighted the ecotourism potential of the sixth addition of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.

He also expressed concern over the shrinking grasslands in Kaziranga due to the construction of artificial highlands.

Later, the minister inaugurated the Florican Ecotourism Gate at Nameri National Park.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The secret to getting ahead is getting started
— Mark Twain

Trinamool: A divided house

It is no secret that Trinamool Congress is a divided house with rebels led by Uluberia (Purba) MLA Ritabrata Banerjee while old faithfuls including Sovande Chatteropadhyaya and Kunal Ghosh continue to owe allegiance to Mamata Banerjee. Now both are competing for a place in the sun. The dissident MLAs far outnumber the rump. Yet the football of party activists on July 21 Martyr's Day was a clear pointer that allegiance of most of the rank and file still lies with Mamata Banerjee. As the two groups endeavour to get the most political mileage, the rump has stolen a march over the dissidents. It has already held protest marches over BJP state government's proposal to evict the hawkers from Kolkata's streets. Mamata Banerjee has participated in an agitation over the leak of National Eligibility Entrance Test (NEET) questions at Padmapukur, not far from her Kalighat home. By doing so, the Trinamool leader identified herself and her party with a nationwide agitation over the leak of questions for students seeking to study medicine. Moreover, the Trinamool supremo has chosen the NEET issue which snowballed into the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan, Union minister for education and a senior BJP leader.

The situation is certainly not to the liking of the dissident faction. To divert attention from his followers inactivity, Ritabrata Banerjee and other dissident leaders have roundly criticised the style of functioning of Mamata Banerjee and her nephew, Diamond Harbour MP Abhishek Banerjee hurling charges of autocratic functioning at the duo. The allegations include charges of the Trinamool supremo overlooking the folly of her nephew leading to the election debacle and instead of pulling him up, heaping honours of a conquering hero on him. Even after the poll debacle, she had asked the victorious MLAs including 84-year Ratua legislator Samar Mukherjee to give Abhishek a standing ovation at the first internal meeting of the party. Leaders who were sworn by Mamata Banerjee during their waking hours overnight switched loyalty to the dissident faction. The desertion of state power minister Aroop Biswas, state urban development minister and Kolkata mayor, Firad Hakim and Birbhumi strong man Anubrata Mondal are pointers that fissures have widened into cracks in Trinamool Congress.

Morale is low in the party So is the discipline read reverence towards Mamata Banerjee which kept prospective dissidents in line. But the electoral debacle snapped the bonds of discipline. On the day of July 21 function, Srirampur MP Kalyan Bandyopadhyay banded words with his party supremo after she asked him to cut short his address. This was an unthinkable state of affairs when a Trinamool government was enjoying a comfortable majority a few months ago. The incident marked a new low in Trinamool Congress.

Threads of freedom, fabric of the future

Every year on August 7, India observes National Handloom Day to celebrate one of its oldest and most enduring traditions. The date is not a matter of administrative convenience. It commemorates the launch of the Swadeshi Movement in 1905, when Indians responded to the partition of Bengal by boycotting foreign goods and embracing indigenous production. Handwoven fabric became more than clothing; it became a symbol of economic self-reliance, political resistance and national identity. More than a century later, the spinning wheel may no longer define India's economy, but the ideals that animated the handloom movement remain remarkably relevant.

National Handloom Day is therefore not merely a tribute to artisans. It is an opportunity to rethink the place of handloom in a rapidly changing economy where heritage, sustainability and livelihoods increasingly intersect.

The history of Indian handloom stretches back several millennia. Long before industrialisation transformed global manufacturing, Indian cotton, silk and muslin travelled through trade routes linking Asia, Africa and Europe. From the famed muslins of Bengal and the Banarasi brocades of Uttar Pradesh to the Pochampally ikat of Telangana, Kanchipuram silk of Tamil Nadu, Patihani of Maharashtra and Muga silk of Assam, handloom traditions evolved alongside regional cultures, each reflecting distinctive weaving techniques, motifs and histories. These textiles were never merely commodities; they embodied the social and artistic identities of communities.

Colonial rule disrupted this flourishing ecosystem. The influx of machine-made textiles from British mills devastated India's traditional weaving economy, reducing many artisan families to poverty. It was against this backdrop that the Swadeshi Movement transformed handspun and handwoven cloth into instruments of political mobilisation. Later, Mahatma Gandhi elevated khadi into a powerful symbol of self-reliance, dignity of labour and resistance against economic exploitation. Every thread carried a political message: true freedom required economic independence.

Independent India inherited this legacy but also the responsibility of preserving it.

Today, the handloom sector remains one of the country's largest sources of non-farm rural employment. It supports millions of weavers and allied workers, many of them



women, while sustaining livelihoods in regions where alternative employment opportunities are limited. Unlike highly mechanised industries, handloom production combines economic activity with the preservation of traditional knowledge passed down through generations.

Yet this invaluable sector stands at a crossroads.

Power looms and mass-produced textiles have transformed consumer markets by offering lower prices and faster production. While mechanisation has undoubtedly expanded access to affordable clothing, it has also intensified competition for traditional weavers. Many struggle with irregular incomes, rising raw material costs, limited access to institutional credit and shrinking markets. Younger generations often hesitate to continue family occupations because weaving no longer promises financial security.

The challenge, however, extends beyond economics. India risks losing intangible cultural heritage if traditional weaving practices disappear. Every weaving cluster represents a repository of techniques, designs and craftsmanship refined over centuries. Once abandoned, such knowledge cannot easily be recreated through museums or archives.

Ironically, global consumer trends now offer the handloom sector an opportunity

that did not exist a few decades ago.

Around the world, there is growing demand for sustainable, ethically produced and environmentally responsible products. Handloom fabrics consume significantly less energy than factory-produced textiles, generate lower carbon emissions and frequently use natural fibres and dyes. At a time when the global fashion industry faces criticism for excessive waste and environmental degradation, India's handloom traditions align naturally with the principles of slow fashion and sustainable consumption.

This ecological advantage deserves greater recognition in public policy.

Government initiatives such as the National Handloom Development Programme, Geographical Indication (GI) protection for traditional products and digital marketing platforms have strengthened the sector in recent years. Nevertheless, much remains to be done. Access to affordable credit, improved design support, modern dyeing facilities, quality certification and digital literacy should become central components of handloom policy. Technology should empower artisans rather than replace them.

Marketing also requires a strategic shift. Too often, handloom products are promoted primarily during festivals or commemora-

tive occasions. Instead, they should be positioned as premium products valued for craftsmanship, authenticity and sustainability throughout the year. Collaborations with designers, e-commerce platforms and international buyers can expand markets while ensuring fair returns for weavers.

Education has an equally important role. Younger Indians often recognise global fashion brands more readily than the weaving traditions of their own country. Schools, universities and museums should introduce students to India's diverse textile heritage, encouraging appreciation not merely as history but as a living cultural practice.

Consumers, too, shape the future of handloom. Every purchase represents a choice between anonymous mass production and the labour of skilled artisans. Supporting handloom is not an argument against industrial textiles; both have legitimate places in the economy. Rather, it is a recognition that markets alone cannot preserve cultural heritage. Conscious consumption can.

The Northeast offers a compelling example. Assam's Muga and Eri silk traditions, woven with remarkable skill and deeply rooted in local culture, demonstrate how handloom sustains both identity and livelihoods. Similar stories can be found across India's weaving clusters, where every fabric carries memories of landscape, community and craftsmanship.

National Handloom Day ultimately reminds us that development is not measured only by the speed of production or the scale of industrial output. It is also measured by a nation's ability to preserve the knowledge, creativity and dignity of those whose hands continue to shape its cultural identity.

The threads woven on India's looms connect the past to the future. They tell the story of resistance during colonial rule, resilience in independent India and renewed relevance in an era searching for sustainable alternatives. Honouring handloom therefore requires more than ceremonial celebrations on August 7. It demands policies that secure livelihoods, markets that reward craftsmanship and consumers who recognise that every handwoven fabric carries not only a tradition but also the aspirations of the artisan who created it.

If India wishes to remain both an economic power and a civilisational one, safeguarding its handloom heritage is not an act of nostalgia. It is an investment in a more inclusive, sustainable and culturally confident future.

Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Education

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The global educational ecosystem is undergoing its most profound structural transformation since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, driven by the rapid convergence of artificial intelligence, high-speed computational infrastructure, and adaptive machine learning architectures. For over two centuries, formal education has operated largely on a standardised, factory-model paradigm where instruction was delivered uniformly to large cohorts of students regardless of individual learning velocities, background knowledge, or personal cognitive preferences. The integration of advanced artificial intelligence systems is dismantling this legacy structure, replacing rigid institutional frameworks with dynamic, real-time responsive learning environments. Economic and sectoral market analyses highlight the extraordinary scale of this shift, with global data indicating that the market value of artificial intelligence in education expanded from roughly eight billion dollars in recent years to over eleven billion dollars in 2026, and is projected to surpass fifty billion dollars by the early 2030s through a compound annual growth rate exceeding twenty-five to forty percent. Industry research reveals that educational organizations have adopted generative artificial intelligence at rates exceeding eighty-six percent, representing the highest adoption velocity across any major public or private sector. This rapid acceleration signifies far more than a simple digitisation of classroom materials; it represents a fundamental overhaul of how human knowledge is organised, delivered, and synthesised. By shifting the primary focus of educational infrastructure from passive information dissemination to active, context-aware cognitive support, artificial intelligence is establishing a new foundation for human learning. Educational institutions worldwide are compelled to re-evaluate traditional attendance metrics, credit-hour frameworks and physical classroom designs to accommodate virtual facilitators, intelligent learning management tools, and predictive student tracking systems. Consequently, the future of education is no longer bound by physical classrooms or temporal timetables but is instead becoming a continuous, lifelong process where advanced algorithms continuously evaluate learning environments, optimise instructional delivery, and democratise access to high-quality academic resources across geographical, cultural and socio-economic divides. As public and private stakeholders invest heavily in this digital frontier, understanding the systemic mechanics of this technological evolution becomes paramount for educators, policymakers and learners navigating the complexities of an AI-driven global economy.

At the heart of this educational revolution lies the concept of hyper-personalised learning pathways, driven by machine learning algorithms that tailor pedagogical material to the exact needs of individual students. Traditional instructional models often leave struggling students behind while simultaneously failing to challenge advanced learners, creating systemic inefficiencies across primary, secondary and tertiary education. Advanced artificial intelligence platforms resolve this dilemma by operating as continuous diagnostic mechanisms that assess a student's comprehension level, cognitive speed, emotional engagement and learning style in real time. Empirical evaluations demonstrate that AI-powered personalised learning systems can increase student engagement rates by up to sixty percent while enhancing overall learning efficiency by nearly fifty-seven percent, significantly shortening the time required to master complex concepts. These platforms utilise sophisticated large language models, natural language processing and neural networks to construct customised study modules, generate real-time practice exercises and offer instantaneous feedback tailored to individual misconceptions. Rather than relying solely on high-stakes, summative end-of-term examinations that measure stored memory, future educational assessment will rely on continuous formative evaluation embedded within the learning process itself. Algorithms can track step-by-step problem-solving methods, pinpointing the

precise mathematical error or conceptual misunderstanding at the exact moment it occurs, thereby preventing foundational knowledge gaps from compounding over time. Furthermore, generative AI tools enable adaptive content rendering, converting dense technical text into interactive visual simulations, audio explanations or simplified analogies based on a student's expressed preferences and neurodiverse requirements. This level of customisation allows neurodivergent learners, individuals with learning disabilities and non-native speakers to access complex academic material on equal footing with their peers. As these adaptive technologies mature, the concept of a fixed curriculum will inevitably give way to fluid, modular learning trajectories that evolve continuously alongside the student's growing capabilities, turning education into an individualised, mastery-based journey rather than a standardised race against a rigid academic calendar. By continuously adapting to the learner's individual cognitive pace, AI transforms education from a rigid, time-bound mandate into an open-ended process of personal growth, intellectual curiosity and lifelong mastery.

Far from rendering human teachers obsolete, the integration of artificial intelligence necessitates a profound redefinition of the educator's role, shifting the pedagogical centerpiece from information delivery to human-centered mentorship and holistic student development. Historically, a significant portion of an educator's time was consumed by routine administrative duties, including manual grading, attendance verification, syllabus design and repetitive assignment creation. By automating these operational tasks through automated scoring engines and administrative software, educators can reclaim substantial working hours to focus directly on student engagement, emotional support, and socio-emotional skill development. In response to these rapid shifts, major international bodies such as UNESCO have emphasised human-centered policy frameworks and established comprehensive AI competency frameworks for teachers and students. These guidelines stress that artificial intelligence must act as a supportive co-pilot rather than a replacement for human educators, preserving teacher agency, pedagogical autonomy and ethical oversight in the classroom. In an AI-augmented educational ecosystem, the value of human instruction shifts from transmitting static facts to cultivating critical thinking, media literacy, complex problem-solving and ethical reasoning. Students must learn how to formulate effective queries, critically evaluate algorithmic outputs for hallucination or underlying bias, and synthesise automated insights into coherent, original arguments. The educator becomes a facilitator of inquiry, guiding students through complex moral dilemmas, collaborative group projects and creative endeavors that machine intelligence cannot replicate. Furthermore, emotional intelligence, empathy, resilience and intercultural communication become central components of the curriculum, ensuring that students develop the human qualities necessary to navigate an increasingly automated global workforce. By establishing this collaborative dynamic between human intuition and machine intelligence, educational institutions can foster resilient learning environments that prepare students for an uncertain, rapidly evolving technological future. This balanced synergy ensures that technological tools amplify human pedagogical wisdom rather than diminishing the vital social bonds that form the heart of authentic learning.

While the transformative potential of artificial intelligence in education is immense, its unchecked deployment introduces significant ethical risks, governance challenges and socio-economic inequities that demand urgent global oversight. A central vulnerability in current educational transformation is the stark imbalance between technological adoption and policy governance. Global surveys indicate that despite widespread student and faculty adoption of generative AI tools, only about twenty percent of higher education institutions and roughly thirty-one percent of primary and secondary school systems have established formal, written AI governance policies. This regulatory lag

creates severe risks regarding data privacy, algorithmic discrimination and intellectual property exploitation. Educational AI platforms gather vast quantities of sensitive student data, including learning behaviors, biometric indicators, emotional states and academic performance records, raising critical questions about data ownership, commercial surveillance and long-term storage security. Moreover, because machine learning models are trained on historical datasets, they run the risk of perpetuating and amplifying societal biases, potentially discriminating against marginalised demographic groups in automated grading, admissions screening or scholarship evaluations. Another pressing concern is the widening digital divide between developed and developing regions, as well as between affluent and under-resourced communities. While institutions in high-income regions possess the cloud infrastructure, high-speed hardware and financial capital required to deploy state-of-the-art AI systems, schools in developing nations frequently struggle with basic connectivity, electrical grid reliability and hardware acquisition. Tariffs on imported digital infrastructure and server hardware further compound these costs, slowing technological updates in low-income regions. Without deliberate policy interventions, equitable funding models and open-access educational technologies, the proliferation of artificial intelligence risks cementing existing socio-economic inequalities, creating a dynamic where privileged students enjoy hyper-personalised AI instruction while disadvantaged learners remain trapped in underfunded, outdated systems. Protecting data sovereignty and guaranteeing universal access must therefore remain foundational priorities for international policymakers seeking to build an ethical and inclusive educational future.

The integration of artificial intelligence signals a fundamental restructuring of higher education institutions, vocational training programs and workforce development ecosystems, extending far beyond physical classroom boundaries. As automation reshapes the global economy, the traditional model of completing a four-year degree to sustain a multi-decade career is rapidly becoming obsolete. Reports from the World Economic Forum emphasise that future education systems must transition toward agile, responsive models that incorporate predictive learning analytics to detect emerging skill shortages and align academic curricula with real-time labor market demands. Higher education institutions are increasingly shifting toward modular, competency-based education and micro-credentialing, allowing learners to acquire specialised, certified skills through AI-driven platforms throughout their professional lives. This shift blurs the line between formal academic instruction and corporate workplace training, establishing continuous reskilling as a standard expectation. At the administrative level, predictive AI models now assist university leadership in forecasting enrollment trends, optimising resource allocation and identifying students at risk of academic failure before dropouts occur. To navigate this future effectively, educational stakeholders must adopt a balanced approach that harnesses technological innovation while firmly anchoring policy in humanistic principles, ethical accountability and democratic access. Achieving this vision demands multi-stakeholder collaboration among governments, technology developers and educators to establish robust guardrails, protect student privacy and correct algorithmic bias. Governments must prioritise public investment in open-source educational infrastructure, ensuring that high-quality AI tools are universally accessible regardless of socioeconomic status. Ultimately, success in this transition will depend on the ability of educational leaders to balance technological capability with humanistic values, ensuring that institutional evolution prioritises long-term human flourishing, social cohesion and equitable empowerment above short-term operational efficiency. By maintaining human dignity and democratic equity as core principles, society can ensure that artificial intelligence serves as an empowering engine for universal human progress and intellectual enlightenment.

The new success story of women entrepreneurs

By : Dr Vijay Garg

There was a time when entrepreneurship was widely regarded as a male-dominated field, and women's roles were often confined to household responsibilities. Today, however, the story is changing dramatically. Across India and around the world, women are emerging as successful entrepreneurs, transforming industries, creating jobs and driving innovation. Their achievements demonstrate that talent, determination and creativity—not gender—are the true foundations of business success.

Over the past decade, women-led entrepreneurship has witnessed remarkable growth. Advances in digital technology, e-commerce, online banking, and social media have made it easier than ever for women to start and expand businesses. From metropolitan cities to small towns and rural communities, women are building enterprises that reach customers across the country and even around the world.

One of the greatest strengths of women entrepreneurs is their resilience. Many have built successful businesses despite facing financial constraints, social stereotypes, limited access to resources and the challenge of balancing professional and family responsibilities. Their journeys prove that determination, innovation and perseverance can overcome even the most difficult obstacles.

Today, women entrepreneurs are making their mark in diverse sectors, including agriculture, food processing, healthcare, education, fashion, information technology, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, tourism, handicrafts and sustainable businesses. Many women-led startups are developing innovative solutions to address real-world problems, contributing not only to economic growth but also to social development and environmental sustainability.

The impact of women entrepreneurship extends far beyond business profits. When women become financially independent, they invest in the education, health, and well-being of their families and communities. Women entrepreneurs often create employment opportunities for others, particularly for women, thereby promoting inclusive growth and reducing economic inequality. Their success strengthens families, empowers communities, and contributes to national development.

Government initiatives, startup

support programs, skill development missions, self-help groups, and improved access to financial services have encouraged more women to pursue entrepreneurship. Easier access to digital payments and online marketplaces has also enabled small businesses to compete on a larger scale. Despite this progress, challenges such as limited access to finance, market opportunities, mentorship, and business networks still remain. Addressing these barriers requires the combined efforts of governments, financial institutions, educational organisations and society as a whole.

Education and skill development are key drivers of successful entrepreneurship. Schools, colleges, and universities should encourage innovation, financial literacy, digital competence and entrepreneurial thinking among young women. Mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs, networking opportunities and practical business education can inspire the next generation of women leaders to become job creators rather than job seekers.

The digital revolution has opened new opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Home-based businesses, freelance services, digital marketing, online education and e-commerce platforms have made entrepreneurship more accessible than ever before. Technology has reduced geographical barriers, allowing women from remote areas to reach national and global markets with their products and services.

Today's women entrepreneurs are not only building successful businesses but also reshaping society. They are challenging stereotypes, promoting innovation, generating employment and contributing to a more inclusive and sustainable economy. Their leadership is helping redefine the future of business by combining profitability with social responsibility.

Ultimately, the new success story of women entrepreneurs is not merely about individual achievement—it is the story of a changing society that recognizes ability over gender. By ensuring equal opportunities, quality education, financial inclusion, supportive policies and a safe business environment, nations can unlock the full potential of women entrepreneurs. Their success will not only strengthen economies but also inspire future generations to dream bigger, innovate boldly, and lead with confidence.

Software companies are disrupting the way we educate tech talent

By: Becky Krill

You may have a sheepskin from a four-year degree program, but have you been to Zen U yet? How about Salesforce University or HubSpot Academy?

If you are trying to fill a talent gap in your company, particularly in emerging technical fields, then your next hires might be graduates from one of these programs. Over the last 10 years, a growing number of companies, most of them selling Software-as-a-service (SaaS) products, have been quietly revolutionizing the way tech talent gets educated for the workforce.

The strange thing is that none of these companies originally set out to disrupt traditional models of education. They are just trying to solve their own important business problems – HubSpot, Salesforce, Zendesk, Hootsuite and others created customer education courses and certifications to promote product adoption and customer retention.

Even if disruption of higher education wasn't their goal, these companies have been slowly re-inventing the optimal environment for technical learning. As a result, they have provided a blueprint for revolutionizing how we prepare technical talent for the workforce.

Solving the "experience problem" for HR

Recently, Sarah Bedrick, a founding member of the academy team at HubSpot, came to speak at the Brooklyn

HubSpot User Group I help organize. The way Sarah tells it, back in 2012 they wanted to transform the idea of customer training and make it more about the learners, the students and the customers.

Thus, HubSpot Academy was born, and that initial course has grown to five certification programs. The original three-member team has grown past 15 members.

The way HubSpot and other companies have chosen to turn their customer training programs into real certification programs is smart. They knew their customers were busy and didn't necessarily have time to complete courses. The certification layer created incentives that helped customers actually succeed and helped the brand stand out in the growing marketing automation marketplace.

It also created a signal to employers looking for job candidates with experience using the same software and methods they use in-house. The result is that now we are seeing tech talent getting jobs from online software certification courses. In other words, these academies are creating meaningful new credentials that employers and institutions recognize.

Another guest speaker at the Brooklyn HubSpot User Group, Nathan Miller, the Director of Sales and Marketing at Revenue River Marketing, has seen that happen firsthand. When his younger sister graduated from high school, Nathan sent her through the HubSpot Academy. She was able to use that experience to help

get into Texas A&M's communication degree program. "She leveraged something new both to educate herself and to give herself a leg up on the competition when it came to college applications," Miller says, adding that he expects the credential will help her when the time for finding internships comes.

Personally, I look for these certifications when I'm interviewing people for a position. At SchoolKeep, we'd be reluctant to hire a marketer who has never used marketing automation software because we need them to ramp up immediately. It's great to see a candidate who's been through a traditional four-year program and has a high-level understanding of how marketing programs are run, but most importantly, we need someone who actually knows how to launch programs and campaigns using automation software.

We just don't have time to train a new hire on how to use our software, which is why if two candidates come to me and one of them has been through HubSpot Academy, I'll lean toward them.

What makes these programs so disruptive?

1. They emphasize hands-on experience over theoretical learning

When it comes to real experience, many software company training courses blow traditional classroom learning out of the water. These new sources of tech training emphasize real practice with the application, not consuming and digesting information.

For HubSpot's Certification, for example, students take a timed multiple choice exam, but they also have a second performance-based practicum. Essentially, the practicum has students create real artefacts, including landing pages and blog posts, and then requires them to demonstrate proficiency by achieving measurable results.

HubSpot Academy has also recently rolled out Projects, hands-on practice modules designed around a specific concept or skill like buyer personas or keyword research.

2. They're building communities of learners and practitioners

I've already mentioned local HubSpot user groups, and other companies like Salesforce have huge international communities of users. But these communities don't have to be in real life. Other companies like Zendesk and Hootsuite are building robust online user groups and forums.

What all of them are doing extraordinarily well is building communities filled with motivated learners, professionals, and practitioners of all levels who continuously educate each other. Building this community creates a virtuous circle that benefits everyone involved.

The software company sees the reputation of their programs and certifications grow.

Students get a place to hone their craft and ask questions.

Employers gain access to a sea of



qualified job candidates who are plugged into their industry.

These communities become more than just places for people to practice with a product. They're also places to network with peers (and potential employers) and to get educated about what's going on in an entire industry.

3. They can iterate quickly as the industry changes

The reality of today's tech talent marketplace is that industries are constantly changing. That cutting-edge thing you were taught in your Intro to Marketing class? It's probably not relevant by the time you graduate and start sending out resumes.

The biggest advantage of these certification programs is that they can change as rapidly as the industry itself. Bedrick says her team is constantly updating their content based on feedback from students, industry best practices, and con-

versations with industry experts.

In fact, since many of these companies are actually leaders in their industries, their courses often set the bar for what students need to be learning, anyway.

Will tech companies replace traditional institutions?

For all their perks, these certifications aren't going to replace traditional institutions. They work in tandem. The comprehensive and foundational learning of a degree program is necessary for the long term. But it's not sufficient.

"Software is eating the world," as Marc Andreessen says. So tech talent is difficult to come by, and recent university grads simply don't have the hands-on experience employers are looking for.

That's the gap these software companies fill today. And as far as I can tell, they're going to be best at doing that for the foreseeable future. (Courtesy: *The Economist*)

Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Recruitment 2026 – 137 Posts, Online Apply

Name of Post: Veterinary Officer/ Block Veterinary Officer
No of Posts: 137 posts
Qualification: Degree in Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Science
Age Limit: 21 to 38 years
Application Fee: Rs. 297.20/-
Start Date: 7th August 2026
Last Date: 6th September 2026

Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Recruitment 2026

Assam Public Service Commission has released a recruitment notification for the recruitment of 137 posts of Veterinary Officer/ Block Veterinary Officer under Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department, Assam, Guwahati. Interested and eligible candidates may check this article for detailed official notification, educational qualification, age limit, salary details, and application procedure to be followed.

It is an excellent opportunity for candidates looking for Veterinary Jobs in Assam, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Jobs in Assam, etc.

Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Recruitment Details

Name of post: Veterinary Officer/ Block Veterinary Officer
No of posts: 137 posts
Category-wise vacancy:

UR: 106, OBC/ MOBC: 6, SC: 11, STP: 9, STH: 4
Pay scale: Pay Band - 4, Pay scale: Rs. 30,000/- to 1,10,000/-, Grade Pay: Rs 12,700/-
Name of department: Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department, Assam

Eligibility Criteria of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Recruitment

Age Limit: The candidates should not be less than 21 years of age and not more than 38 years of age as on 01st January 2026.

Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

SC: 5 years, ST: 5 years, OBC/ MOBC: 3 years, PwBD: 10 years
For more details pl read the official notification/s.

Educational Qualification: Candidates must have at least a Degree in Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Science from any recognized university/ Institution.

Citizenship: Candidates must be Indian Citizens as defined in Articles 5 to 8 of the Constitution of India.

Residency:

(i) The candidate must be a permanent resident of Assam.
(ii) The candidate must produce PRC issued in Assam for educational purpose/ Employment Exchange Registration certificate will be treated as proof of residency.

Application Fee

Candidates have to pay an application fee as mentioned below:

General: 297.20
OBC/ MOBC: 197.20
SC/ ST: 47.20
BPL: 47.20
PwBD: 47.20

How to Apply for Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these posts by visiting at official recruitment portal of Assam Public Service Commission. They may follow below mentioned steps .

- Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .
- Click on Online Application Form link .
- A new webpage will be opened.
- Enter all your personal and educational details as required .
- Upload your passport sized photograph and signature and other required documents.
- Pay the application fee as per your category and at the end click on submit button .
- Don't forget to take a print of submitted application form .

Important Dates of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Vacancy 2026

- Starting date of submission of online application: 7th August 2026
- Last date of submission of online application: 6th September 2026
- Last date for payment of application fee: 8th September 2026

NICL Assistant Recruitment 2026 – Online Apply for 500 Posts

Organization: National Insurance Company Ltd. (NICL)
Name of Post: Assistant
No of Posts: 500 posts
Qualification: Graduate
Age Limit: 21 to 30 years
Application Fee: Rs 850/-
Start Date: 18th July 2026
Last Date: 7th August 2026

NICL Assistant Recruitment 2026
National Insurance Company Ltd. (NICL) , India's Oldest & a leading Public

Sector General Insurance Company has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 500 Assistant Posts in Class III cadre from open market. Interested and eligible candidates may check this article for detailed official notification, educational qualification, age limit, salary details, and application procedure to be followed. The online application process for NICL Assistant Vacancy 2026 starts from 18th July 2026 to 7th August 2026.

NICL Assistant Recruitment Details

Name of post: Assistant
No of posts: 266 posts
No of posts in Assam: 18 posts

Category-wise vacancy:

SC: 67
ST: 36
OBC: 104
EWS: 38
UR: 255

Scale of Pay: The monthly pay scale offered by National Insurance Company Limited to Assistants is Rs. 36,290-2115(1)-38,405-2310(2)-43,025-2600(5)-56,025-3005(2)-62,035-3660(3)-73,015-3800(2)-80,615-4050(5)-100,865

Exam centres in Assam: Dibrugarh, Guwahati, Jorhat, Silchar and Tezpur

Eligibility Criteria of NICL Recruitment

Age Limit: Candidate age must be between 21 to 30 years as on 1st July 2026. Candidates born not earlier than 02.07.1996 and not later than 01.07.2005 (both days inclusive) are only eligible to apply.

Age Relaxation: Permissible relaxations in upper age limit for different categories are as under:

SC/ ST: 5 years, OBC/ NCL: 3 years, Ex-Servicemen: 3 years
PwBD: 10 years, PwBD (OBC): 13 years , PwBD (SC/ST): 15 years

Educational Qualification: Candidate must possess the minimum qualification of Graduation in any discipline from a recognized University or any equivalent qualification recognized as such by the Central Government.

Local Language Proficiency: Knowledge of Reading, Writing and Speaking of Regional Language of the State / UT against the vacancies for which a candidate wishes to apply, is essential. To ascertain the candidate's familiarity with the Regional Language of the State / UT, a Regional Language Test will be conducted before final selection. Candidates not found to be proficient in the Regional Language Test would be disqualified.

Application Fee: Candidates have to pay a certain amount as application fee depending up on their category. The details are as given below:

Category	Fee
SC/ST/PwBD/EXS	Nil
Others	Rs 850/-

Selection Process

The structure of the Examinations which will be conducted online are as follows:

Preliminary Examination

Candidates have to qualify in each of the three tests by securing cut-off marks to be decided by the company.

Subjects	No. of Questions	Maximum Marks	Time allotted
English Language	30	30	20 minutes
Reasoning Ability	35	35	20 minutes
Quantitative Aptitude	35	35	20 minutes
Total	100	100	60 minutes

Main Examination

The Main examination consists of following sections.

Subjects	No. of Questions	Maximum Marks	Time allotted
Test of Reasoning	40	40	30 minutes
Test of English Language	40	40	30 minutes
Test of Numerical Ability	40	40	30 minutes
Test of General Awareness	40	40	15 minutes
Test of Computer Knowledge	40	40	15 minutes
Total	200	200	120 minutes

Regional Language Test

Candidates shortlisted in the online Main Examination will subsequently be called for Regional Language Test to be conducted by the Company. Candidates applying for vacancy under State / UT other than their domiciled State / UT, have to appear and qualify the Regional Language Test in the language of State / UT for which they have applied.

How to Apply for NICL Recruitment?

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these vacancy through online mode by visiting official NICL Recruitment Portal. Candidates may follow below mentioned steps to apply for NICL Assistant Recruitment .

Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .

- Click on the "Online Application Form" and complete the registration process by clicking "New User ? Register Now".
- In the next stage, click on "Online Application Form" Link and Login.
- Fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.
- Make payment of application fee as per your category and submit the form.
- At the end, take a print out of the application form .

Important Dates of NICL Assistant Recruitment 2026

- Starting date of submission of online application: 18th July 2026
- Last date of submission of online application: 7th August 2026
- Date Phase I Online Exam: 27th August 2026
- Date Phase II Online Exam: 30th October 2026

ASTC Recruitment 2026 – Manager (Finance) Vacancy [Walk-in]

ASTC Recruitment 2026

Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC) has released a recruitment notification for the recruitment of 1 Manager (Finance) post in Assam State Transport Corporation, Guwahati on purely contractual basis. Interested and eligible candidates may check this article for detailed official notification, educational qualification, age limit, salary details, and application procedure to be followed.

ASTC Recruitment Details

Name of post: Manager (Finance)
Name of organization: Assam State Transport Corporation (ASTC)
No of posts: 01 post
Age Limit: Up to 30 years.
Pay: Rs. 65,000/- per month
Educational Qualification: The candidate must be a qualified Chartered Accountant (CA) from a recognized Institute.
Period of Engagement: Selected candidates will be engaged initially for 11 (Eleven) months which may be extended depending upon the requirement and satisfactory performance.

How to Apply for ASTC Recruitment ?

Application/ CV supported by 3 (three) copies of passport size photographs, educational qualification certificates, age proof, experience certificates and other relevant documents should be submitted to the following address from 7th August, 2026 to 14th August, 2026 up to 5:00 PM.

The Managing Director,

Assam State Transport Corporation, Head Quarters, Rupnagar, Guwahati-32.

Walk-in Schedule

- Date of interview: 20th August 2026 • Time: 11.00 AM
- Venue: O/o Managing Director, Assam State Transport Corporation, Head Quarters, Rupnagar, Guwahati-781032.

Important Dates of ASTC Guwahati Recruitment 2026

- Starting date of application submission: 7th August 2026
- Last date of application submission: 14th August 2026

Alegra Labs Recruitment 2026 – 2 Full Stack Python Developer Posts @ Guwahati

Alegra Labs Recruitment 2026

Alegra Labs is an offshore Web Development Company, registered under the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI). Alegra Labs has created a wealth of immensely satisfied clientele across the world in 12 different countries, including USA, Canada, Australia, Israel, Spain, United Kingdom and South Africa to name just a few.

Alegra Labs is looking for 2 Full Stack Python Developer Posts in Guwahati.

Alegra Labs Recruitment Details

Name of post: Full Stack Python Developer (AI/ML Focus)
No of posts: 2 posts
Pay: 25k – 50k
Age Limit: NA
Educational Qualification: MCA/M.E/M.Tech/MSc in IT or Computer Science.

Skills (Backend + AI/ML Focus):

- Strong proficiency in Python
- Experience with:
 - o Scikit-learn o Neural Networks o NumPy
 - Knowledge of:
 - o Distance matrix & memory evaluation (for benchmarking)
 - o Embeddings & clustering
 - o Matrix operations (dot product, multiplication, etc.)
 - o Normalization (L1/L2)
 - Understanding of learning types:
 - o Supervised o Unsupervised o Reinforcement Learning
 - Algorithms:
 - o Linear Regression o Logistic Regression o Decision Trees
 - o Random Forest o K-Nearest Neighbors
- Experience with Docker (deployment & workflows)

Frontend Requirement:

- Must be comfortable with frontend development
- Experience in Vue.js / Typescript preferred

Other Technical Requirements:

- Experience in Database: MySQL, PostgreSQL
 - Good to have: MongoDB, Redis, Firebase
 - Comfortable working with Linux, Git Repository, GULP, Webpack
 - Good to have experience in CI/CD & DevOps
- Training Clause: If the candidate is not fully aligned with requirements, they must undergo a training period before confirmation.

Application fee: NIL

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A deal with Iran over the Strait of Hormuz may require a compromise from Trump

'He divides the world into winners and losers, and this would make him a loser'

WASHINGTON, Aug 7: To reach a deal with Iran that reopens the economically vital Strait of Hormuz, President Donald Trump may need to do something out of character — compromise.

Any concession would be tough for the Republican president, who has insisted there is no truth to his sagging poll numbers, the sluggish economy and the US military's dwindling stockpiles of key weapons following the Iran war he launched with Israel more than five months ago.

"He divides the world into winners and losers, and this would make him a loser," said Eliot Cohen, who served as counselor of the State Department in the George W Bush administration. "And the image of being a loser, I think, would be intolerable for him."

The sticking point has been over control of the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20 per cent of the world's oil normally flows. While both sides say a deal is close, the Trump administration has ruled out



any arrangement that would cement Iran's grip over the Persian Gulf waterway, including Tehran charging fees. But Iran has insisted on some measure of control, saying the strait will not go back to being an open international waterway as it was before the war. Despite thousands of US strikes, Iran can still fire drones and missiles at vessels, giving it a chokehold over commercial shipping.

Cohen said yielding ground to Iran would be difficult for the pres-

ident, even if the conflict keeps gasoline prices elevated and poses problems for Republicans in November's midterm elections.

But David Schenker, a former State Department official in the first Trump administration, said the increasing economic pressure may actually prompt Trump to compromise on the strait, even if it's likely to have profound implications on global trade.

"There will be a lot of spin both ways, but my guess is that the pres-

ident has tipped his hand as to the urgency for him of resolving the crisis," said Schenker, now a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "This is a concession he may very well be willing to make."

Trump, however, has so far conceded little about the war.

He posted on social media Thursday that the US military still has "massive amounts" of weapons and that large amounts are being manufactured. He threatened jail time for the alleged "leakers" of information on the nation's weapons stockpiles. Trump was referencing a Washington Post story that reported his frustration with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth over the shrinking inventories of advanced weapons, as the Cabinet had gathered at Camp David last week.

A senior administration official said there had been a "robust and healthy" discussion about Iran in the Cabinet meeting and would not provide additional details except to say there had not been a "knock-down, drag-out fight" over the matter. (AP)

Student gunman kills at least 7 people at high school, home outside Bangkok, officials say

NONTHABURI (THAILAND), Aug 7: A student shot several people at a high school outside Bangkok on Friday morning, killing at least five and wounding several others, according to authorities, who said the gunman also appeared to have separately killed his two grandparents.

The gunman took his own life, officials said.

Five school staff members, including teachers and administrators, died in the shooting around 10 am at Debsirin Nonthaburi School in Nonthaburi province northwest of Bangkok, Deputy Interior Minister Polapee Suwunchuee said at the scene.

The shooter also killed his two grandparents at home prior to the school shooting, Suwunchuee said.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul, speaking after touring the school, confirmed reports that the shooter was 14 years old and killed himself. He said the boy, who lived with his grandparents, had shown signs of stress connected to school.

The gun, described by police as small and compact, was legally registered to his grandfather, he



said. About an hour after the shooting, people stood outside comforting one another as police and first responders walked around the educational state school, which has an enrolment of about 3,000 students ranging from 12 to 18 years old.

A witness told reporters that students hid inside a classroom while they heard gunshots from another building before police officers knocked on the door and cleared a way for them to leave the building.

Bangyai Hospital, about 5 kilometres from the school, said 23 people were injured and 10 were in critical condition, with most suffering gunshot wounds. Earlier re-

ports gave conflicting casualty numbers.

After the school shooting, police went to the home of the shooter's grandparents but the door was locked and there was no response to their calls, regional police Commander Wattana Yeejeen said.

Officers broke the door lock and found both the grandparents had died of apparent gunshot wounds, Wattana said.

Several family members of the alleged shooter, including his uncle and sisters of the grandfather who were at the family home while police investigated, said he usually kept to himself and was a good student. (AP)

Police officers bitten, spat at in anti-migrant protests in UK town

LONDON, Aug 7: A UK police force said on Friday that its officers have been tackling serious violence, including being bitten and spat at by protesters, over days of anti-migrant clashes at a town in eastern England.

Norfolk Constabulary condemned the violence over three nights of disorder at Thetford as protesters targeted properties they believed were housing asylum seekers.

Four people were arrested and a 68-year-old man has been charged with possession of an offensive weapon, namely a wooden bat, since the protests turned violent on Tuesday night.

"As police intervened, members of the group became physically aggressive towards officers — two were taken to hospital after a male officer was struck with a rock and a female officer was seriously bitten, breaking the skin. A third officer was also spat at," Norfolk Police said.

Properties have been damaged in the protests, including windows being smashed and fences broken, as people

attempted to break into residential properties.

Asylum seekers were forced to flee some of these accommodations amid the disorder, which entered its third consecutive night on Thursday.

"We will always facilitate and support the right to peaceful protest, and we recognise that people may hold strong views and feelings about issues. However, no matter how strongly those views are held, there is no place for violence, intimidation or criminal behaviour," said Assistant Chief Constable Julie Dean, overseeing the response to the disorder for the Norfolk Constabulary.

"Our role is to keep people safe. We have a duty to protect everyone in our communities, maintain public order and prevent harm. We will not stand by and allow violence to take place, whether that is directed towards members of the public, local residents or police officers carrying out their duties."

"Where criminal offences are committed, we will take robust action. Our

focus remains on maintaining public safety and ensuring people can go about their lives without fear of violence or disorder," she said.

Her officers made arrests for offences including public order, harassment and possession of an offensive weapon, with some still in custody while others have been released on bail.

Extra policing measures were enforced until Friday, which gave officers the power to order anyone committing anti-social behaviour, or likely to do so, to leave the area. According to Norfolk Police, several asylum seekers had to be escorted from homes as a result of the unrest this week.

"The ugly scenes in Thetford over the past few days have been difficult to watch and are deeply concerning," said Terry Jemmy, the Labour member of Parliament for the area.

"People have been pulled from their homes — a place of safety — and forcibly removed, with reports of members of the public breaking into homes, taking property and smashing windows. (PTI)

Pakistan, Saudi and Turkiye sign joint defence agreement

ISLAMABAD, Aug 7: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye on Friday signed a key joint defence agreement under which an attack against one of them will be treated as an attack against all of them, amid increasing security concerns in the wake of escalating tensions in West Asia.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan signed the pact after the Makkah Al-Mukarramah Summit for Joint Defence held at the Al-Safa Palace in Islam's holiest city of Mecca, according to a joint statement.

The 'Makkah Joint Defence Agreement' is "intended to strengthen collective deterrence against any act of aggression, and stipulates that any armed attack against any one of the three States shall be regarded as an attack against them all," it said.

"It further provides for the enhancement of all aspects of defence cooperation among the three States," the statement said.



The agreement reflects "the three States' shared commitment to further strengthening their collective security and to promoting peace, security, and stability in the region and beyond, in pursuit of a secure and prosperous future," the statement said.

The pact ties together Pakistan, the only nuclear-armed Muslim country, Saudi Arabia, the home to Islam's holiest sites

and one of the world's top oil exporters, and Turkiye, a NATO member.

The development comes at a time when the West Asia conflict has widened across multiple fronts, including the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, prompting Gulf states to strengthen regional security coordination. Sharif had visited Saudi Arabia in April, during which he had held talks with the Kingdom's top leadership. (PTI)

3 inmates killed, over 20 injured in fresh prison clashes in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Aug 7: Three inmates were killed and 23 others injured in separate clashes at two prisons in Sri Lanka over the past 24 hours, officials said on Friday.

The clashes were the latest in a series of incidents of prison unrest in the island nation over the past month, which the public security minister has said are suspected to be part of an organised plot.

At the Kuruwita prison, 60 kms southeast of Colombo, two inmates were killed and 13 others injured on Friday after a violent situation, officials said.

"The immediate trigger for the unrest appears to have been the detection of a package containing narcotics and the subsequent arrest. It is evident that this was a response to the government's anti-narcotics drive," Justice Minister Harshana Nanayakkara told reporters.

The injured are receiving treatment at Ratnapura Hospital.

Hours before the incident, a similar tense unrest took place at Colombo's Magazine Prison.

At around 10:00 pm on Thursday, about 40 inmates rioted after breaking through a section, Public Security Minister Ananda Wijepala told parliament.

One inmate was killed in the violence while 10 others were injured.

According to prison officials, both prison riots have been brought under control with the deployment of troops.

Earlier on Friday, around 30 inmates at the Pallansena Prison climbed onto the roof of a ward and staged a protest following the morning breakfast, Minister Wijepala said.

He added that police and prison officials are working to control the situation.

At parliament, Wijepala said that suspicions have arisen over whether the escalating violence reported at several prisons was linked to an organised plot.

He said the government aims to suppress the unrest while safeguarding the lives of all inmates and officers, and added that President Anura Kumara Disanayake has called for a meeting of all stakeholders involved in prisons later in the day.

Earlier this week, Justice Minister Nanayakkara also told parliament that the government was aware of more riots at prisons and suspected them to be organised acts of sabotage. (PTI)

Russian retail giant's warehouse burns after Ukraine's latest long-range drone attack

MOSCOW, Aug 7: Ukrainian long-range drones hit a warehouse in the Ural Mountains belonging to Russia's biggest online retailer, more than 2,000 kilometres from the two countries' border, local officials and the company said Friday.

Ukraine has regularly hit targets in the distant Urals this year and has even struck a Russian oil refinery in western Siberia, nearly 2,500 kilometres from the border. The attacks are examples of how Kyiv has used drone innovation as a key part of its response to the invasion by its much bigger enemy more than four years ago.

Its successes have drawn international interest and drone cooperation agreements with nine countries, with further deals being negotiated with 15 other countries, according to Kyiv officials.

A Wildberries warehouse in Yekaterinburg, Russia's fourth-largest city, was set ablaze by the attack, the company said. Most merchandise wasn't damaged, it said, unlike at some of the more than a dozen other Wildberries depots struck by Ukraine in recent weeks that have burned down.

Kyiv is trying to rattle the Russian public and the Kremlin with the attacks.

The regional governor, Denis Pasler, said three drones hit the warehouse's roof. Artym Zhoga, the Kremlin's representative in the region, said that 800 people were evacuated from the warehouse and nobody was hurt.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is pushing for his country to keep up the pace of technological development, especially in air defence systems to help stop Russian ballistic missiles that are exploiting Ukraine's shortage of American-made Patriot interceptor missiles and battering civilian areas.

A joint European anti-ballistic development programme is already underway, Zelenskyy said late Thursday, with 10 countries engaged in developing an anti-ballistic shield. Europe is concerned about Moscow's ambitions on the continent beyond Ukraine.

"Ukraine is capable of producing its (anti-ballistic) missile and launcher, while our partners will provide the necessary components and critical elements — radars, sensors, and everything else required," Zelenskyy said on social media. "An anti-ballistic program

of our own -- one that is truly large-scale -- will greatly benefit everyone in Europe."

At the same time, Ukraine is working on manufacturing its own ballistic missiles to use against Russia. "The tests have shown strong potential. We need to turn this into a real weapon," Zelenskyy said.

Ukrainian front-line defences in eastern regions, meanwhile, remain under strain as Russia's bigger army looks for a breakthrough after months of minimal advances that Western analysts and official says have had a high cost for Moscow in troop casualties.

Ukraine has been evacuating children from Kramatorsk, one of the four eastern Donetsk region cities that make up Ukraine's so-called Fortress Belt. The line of four large and heavily defended cities, about 50 kilometres long, has been key to denying Moscow its goal of seizing Ukraine's industrial heartland.

The head of the Donetsk region's regional military administration, Vadym Filashkin, said Friday that more than 800 people, including 91 children, were evacuated over the previous 24 hours. (AP)

Man charged with arson in Spokane

WASHINGTON, Aug 7: A man charged with starting one of the wildfires in Spokane, Washington, that have destroyed hundreds of buildings planned the crime for weeks and researched when the weather would be best for igniting it, police said.

Aaron Farinacci expressed that "fire is powerful, beautiful, and that things that go through fire experience a kind of rebirth," Spokane County Detective Michael Drapeau said in a court filing Wednesday, recalling his interview with him. Farinacci, 37, is charged with starting the Old Trails Fire, one of three fires in the Spokane area that have burned more than 850 homes and forced the evacuation of tens of thousands of people. He is also charged in connection with two smaller fires ignited in the summer of 2025.

He was scheduled to be arraigned on three first-degree arson charges Thursday, but his lawyer asked for a competency evaluation before he enters a plea. Spokane Superior Court Judge Jeremy Schmidt said he would review that request. He set bond for USD 2 million, ruling that Farinacci was a risk to community safety, a flight risk and that there was potential for a violent offense.

Defense attorney Colin Charbonneau did not immediately re-

turn messages seeking comment.

Farinacci researched the weather to predict a day that would have "high winds, low humidity, sort of high heat" for starting the fire, Drapeau said. He also looked up the work of a well-known serial arsonist and purchased items to make a "time delay device" for igniting a wildfire, using notebook paper, matches, a cigarette and a rubber band, the detective said.

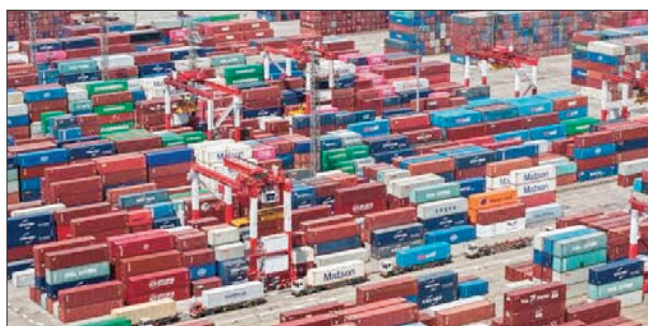
Farinacci picked Saturday, Aug. 1, to start the fire because he knew there would be strong winds — reaching 50 mph (80 kph), the detective said. He said he knew it "was gonna get bad," the detective said, but Farinacci claimed he didn't intend it to grow as much as it did.

Paul Child, 64, has been credited with leading police to Farinacci. He was driving with his grandson along some railroad tracks when he saw a man standing there and looking toward nearby trees. About 10 minutes later, the man was still there.

"He was bent over in the brush, acting nervous," Child told The Associated Press on Tuesday. "You get the feeling this guy's up to something."

Drapeau said Farinacci also admitted responsibility for 25 fires near his apartment building in summer 2025. Most were near the Spokane River or the Centennial Trail. (AP)

China's exports slow slightly in July despite robust demand for high-tech products



BANGKOK, Aug 7: China's exports slowed slightly in July from the month before despite robust demand for high-tech electronics and vehicles.

Customs data released Friday showed China's trade surplus narrowed to USD 112.5 billion from USD 125.6 billion in June.

Exports rose nearly 24 per cent in July from a year earlier,

compared with a 27 per cent increase in June. Imports climbed 27.5 per cent year-on-year, but that was lower than June's jump of 36 per cent.

Disruptions to port operations due to typhoons helped to slow trade, analysts said.

"The boom in Chinese trade slowed a touch in July but the big picture is that export and im-

port values remain elevated, helped by soaring global demand for electronics and green tech products," Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics said in a report.

The Iran war interfered with shipments of aluminum from the Middle East, leading to an increase in Chinese exports of the metal, he noted. Trade data show China has fully transitioned from providing mostly low cost manufacturing to supplying vital machinery and components for advanced manufacturing.

Exports of high-tech items surged nearly 41 per cent in January-July from the same period the year before, while shipments of vehicles jumped 55 per cent and overall exports of electronics and machinery rose 26 per cent. (AP)

Syria's Health Ministry corrects Damascus minibus blast toll: 14 wounded, no deaths

DAMASCUS, Aug 7: Syria's Health Ministry said Friday that 14 people were wounded, three of them critically, but that there were no fatalities in the explosion of a minivan taxi a day earlier in a Damascus suburb.

The Health Ministry had said Thursday night that two people were killed in the blast. In a statement Friday, it said the fatalities had been incorrectly recorded based on three severed limbs that were pulled from the wreckage.

After further investigation, the limbs were determined to belong to living patients who were undergoing surgery, the statement said. Officials said the explosion in Jaramana was caused by an explosive device planted in the minivan taxi, which was carrying passengers at the time of the blast.

A little-known group calling itself Minbar Ansar al-Rasoul issued a statement claiming responsibility for the attack. Syrian authorities have not announced any arrests or the results of their investigation into the bombing.

Jaramana, which is home to a large population of the Druze religious minority, has faced tensions between some members of the community and Sunni Muslim Syrians supportive of the country's current Islamist-led government. Tensions flared in April 2025, when at least 10 people were killed in sectarian clashes between Druze gunmen and pro-government fighters. (AP)

No.DPRD/BTC/(15thFC)/TVIII/Chi-38/2026/6
Dated Kokrajhar the 7th Aug., 2026
PRESS NOTICE
The Director, P&RD Department, BTC, Kokrajhar invites through e-Tendering process for the work of "Const. of Solar Powered Standalone DW facility with Odex System at Burichourang (Activity Code-128529875)." for an amount not exceeding to Rs.26,50,000.00 (Rupees twenty six lakh fifty thousand) only under the Award of 15th Finance Commission (Tied Grant) for the year 2025-26 during 2026-27 from Register Contractor from APWD (Roads/Building/PHED/ Firm, Class, A,B, BTC, etc.
Details may be seen at <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours
Sd/- Director,
Panchayat & Rural Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar
IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/1113

No.DPRD/BTC/(15thFC)/TVIII/Chi-39/2026/6
Dated Kokrajhar the 7th Aug., 2026
PRESS NOTICE
The Director, P&RD Department, BTC, Kokrajhar invites through e-Tendering process for the work of "Const. of Solar Powered Standalone DW facility with Odex System at Boropara (Activity Code-128529869)." for an amount not exceeding to Rs.26,50,000.00 (Rupees twenty six lakh fifty thousand) only under the Award of 15th Finance Commission (Tied Grant) for the year 2025-26 during 2026-27 from Register Contractor from APWD (Roads/Building/PHED/ Firm, Class, A,B, BTC, etc.
Details may be seen at <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also at the office of the undersigned during office hours
Sd/- Director,
Panchayat & Rural Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar
IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/1115

'The Bill removes the statutory guarantee of zero-MDR under Section 10A' 'Dubious claims': Cong's Ramesh hits back at Sitharaman on taxation bill

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Friday hit back at Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman after she accused him of spreading "canards" over the Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, and said government assurances or tweets are no substitute for statutory safeguards.

In a long post on X, Ramesh said the finance minister's response to his "so-called canards" hinges on five "dubious claims".

He said the claim that Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) applies only to merchants and not to customers is misleading.

"MDR is charged to merchants but it is inevitable that they pass transaction costs on to consumers through higher prices or differential pricing -- just as they do with credit and debit card payments. Moreover, 'merchants' include medium and small businesses, kirana stores, and even street vendors, the very backbone of UPI adoption," the Congress general



secretary in-charge communications.

On the claim that it will support banks and fintechs to invest more in infrastructure, innovation, and security, Ramesh said UPI was built as a public digital good, and the government has a responsibility to protect it.

"Zero MDR was critical to its success, enabling small shops and roadside vendors to make and receive payments without transac-

tion charges. Better alternatives are also on the table. The RBI has the capacity to support the UPI ecosystem without charging merchants or consumers. Why is this option not being considered," he asked.

On the Steering Committee yet to decide on MDR, the Congress leader said policy-making is not just for the present but also for the future.

"The Bill removes the statutory

guarantee of zero-MDR under Section 10A. It leaves future charges to government notification. Government assurances or tweets are no substitute for statutory safeguards, especially when earlier assurances on retaining zero-MDR are now being reversed," Ramesh said.

He further said that the timing raises legitimate concerns.

The amendment comes shortly after the U.S. Trade Representative's 2026 National Trade Estimate Report criticised India's UPI and RuPay ecosystem, as well as Brazil's Pix, since they take up market share from Visa and MasterCard, Ramesh said.

"While Brazil has continued to back Pix as a strategic public digital infrastructure, the Modi Government is now weakening statutory protections for UPI," he alleged.

Ramesh pointed out that Google Pay and Walmart-controlled PhonePe together process over 80 per cent of UPI transactions. (PTI)

AAP to hold nationwide town halls against E20 fuel from today



NEW DELHI, Aug 7: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) announced on Friday that it will organise a series of nationwide town halls against E20 fuel, beginning August 8, to interact with vehicle owners and gather feedback on issues arising from ethanol-blended petrol.

Addressing a press conference here, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said the party had earlier organised a town hall in Delhi on the issue, in which around seven lakh people from across the country participated online. He said the party will take the campaign to different states, holding public meetings to understand people's concerns regarding E20 fuel (20 per cent crop-based ethanol with 80 per cent petrol) and raise awareness about the issue.

Singh said Delhi AAP president

Saurabh Bharadwaj will coordinate the nationwide campaign. According to the party, the campaign will begin on August 8 in West Bengal, followed by programmes in Gujarat and Haryana on August 9, Telangana on August 11 and Chhattisgarh on August 17. Singh said the party would also appeal to people to join its protest against E20 fuel during these public meetings.

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal opposed the E20 fuel programme, alleging it is being imposed on people and impacts vehicle performance. However, industry executives sought to allay concerns over the use of E20, saying the fuel has undergone rigorous scientific testing, is safe for both new and older vehicles, and is critical for reducing India's dependence on imported crude oil. (PTI)

Continue on path shown by PDP founder even if Iltija and I are in jail: Mehbooba to party workers

SRINAGAR, Aug 7: Accused of assaulting an on-duty police officer, PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Friday said she and her daughter were being targeted for raising their voice and urged the party workers to continue the struggle for resolution of the Kashmir issue even if she and Iltija go to jail.

A day after the mother-daughter duo was named in the FIR at the Kothibagh police station, the former chief minister of the erstwhile state urged her party supporters to remain steadfast on the path shown by PDP founder Mufti Mohammad Sayeed for the resolution of the Kashmir issue. Iltija has been summoned to the police station on Friday for questioning.

"Iltija has been called to the Kothibagh police station. She will go. (If) they call me tomorrow, I will also go. But, remember one thing: whether I or Iltija are inside (jail) or outside, you will not leave Sayeed's agenda, vision and the roadmap that he has given for the resolution of the Kashmir issue. Article 370 is a part of that (roadmap)," Mehbooba said addressing her party workers at the PDP headquarters here.

"They (the BJP government) trampled the Constitution, and a time will come when they will

have to correct it. But you do not have to lose courage," she added.

She urged her party to remain unfazed and said the PDP will continue its struggle for the restoration of Article 370 abrogated by the Centre on August 5, 2019.

"If you have to save the real Jammu and Kashmir, its land and resources, then you have to remain steadfast. I am here now; I may not be here tomorrow. Whether I or Iltija are here or not, the PDP will continue its peaceful and democratic struggle for the restoration of Article 370," she said.

Mehbooba said targeting the PDP was not something new.

"Our party was broken, and new parties were created. Those parties defended the abrogation of Article 370 in the country. The targeting of the PDP is still going on. Why was there no action against the National Conference or Congress or others? Talking about (Article) 370 has become a crime. Those who talk about (Article) 370 are branded criminals," she said.

The PDP president expressed her gratitude to the party workers for turning up to protest on the evening of August 4 and the next day.

"I thank you all for showing the country's institutions that Article 370

Prashant Kishor discusses ways to strengthen NCP during meeting with Sunetra Pawar, Parth

MUMBAI, Aug 7: Political strategist-turned-politician Prashant Kishor, who recently secured a landmark victory in the Bankipur assembly bypoll in Patna, discussed ways to strengthen the organisation of Maharashtra's ruling NCP with party president and Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar, a party functionary said.

Kishor, who heads the Jan Suraj Party, held a meeting with Pawar at her official residence 'Devigiri' in south Mumbai on Thursday.

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) spokesperson Suraj Chavan said Kishor, who is advising the party on organisational rebuilding, met Sunetra Pawar, her MP son Parth Pawar and senior leaders.

"It was an internal meeting to discuss how to strengthen the party and ensure development programmes of the government reach the grassroots," he said.

Chavan rejected speculation that Kishor expressed displeasure over the style of functioning of NCP state president Sunil Tatkar and sought his removal.

When asked about it, state Food



and Drug Administration (FDA) Minister Narhari Zirwal, who belongs to the NCP, said, "There is nothing like that..."

This is the second time that Kishor, who had scripted poll victories for leaders from Narendra Modi and Mamata Banerjee to Arvind Kejriwal, has met Sunetra Pawar since the death of her husband and the then deputy CM Ajit Pawar in a plane crash in Baramati in January this year.

Following their first meeting a

few months ago, Parth Pawar had said that Kishor was known to his family.

Kishor stunned the BJP in its Bankipur bastion in the recently concluded assembly bypoll in Bihar. The bypoll was necessitated after the sitting MLA, Nitin Nabin, who is also the BJP president, vacated the seat following his election to the Rajya Sabha. The BJP had fielded youth leader Neeraj Kumar Sinha, whom Kishor defeated in his electoral debut. (PTI)

J-K CM Omar backs Mohan Bhagwat's 'Gen Z grievances genuine' remark

JAMMU, Aug 7: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday supported Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat's remark that "Gen Z grievances are genuine and protesting doesn't make them anti-national".

Referring to Mohan Bhagwat's remark, the chief minister said it was encouraging that a distinction was made between opposing the government and acting against the country.

"The good thing is that Mohan Bhagwat ji has acknowledged this distinction. Opposing the government is not the same as opposing the country. In fact, opposing the government is often beneficial for the nation because it helps correct mistakes wherever they occur," he said.

On Thursday while addressing a gathering of around 2,000 Gen Z and Gen Alpha members at India's International Movement to Unite Nations (IIMUN) 15th anniversary event in Mumbai, Bhagwat said, "If Gen Z members are agitating, they are not anti-national; they are our people. It is our next generation. You need a dialogue and rapport with them."

Abdullah urged authorities to stop action against students who participated in the agitation over alleged irregularities in the NEET examination and said protesting against the government should not be equated with opposing the nation.

Abdullah said the agitation helped ensure accountability, expressing hope that it would lead to improvements in the conduct of future examinations.

Expressing concern over reports of action against the protesters, Abdullah said students were allegedly being manhandled, booked in criminal cases and harassed on social media. In some instances, police reportedly summoned their relatives. "I believe this entire course of action should stop," he said.

The Cockroach Janta Party's (CJP) "Sansad Chalo" protest march turned violent in New Delhi on July 20. Police said more than 118 police personnel, including several senior officers, were injured and around 70 protesters 60 protesters also sustained injuries in the scuffle. On July 25, 2026, the CJP called off its 36-day youth-led protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. The agitation ended immediately after Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned and the government agreed to key demands, including compensation for affected families and the withdrawal of FIRs against protesters.

Referring to the protests in Jharkhand, Abdullah said he hoped Chief Minister Hemant Soren would engage with the protesting students instead of ignoring their demands.

"He should call them, hold talks with them, and if anything wrong has actually happened, take action against those responsible, just as we did here," Abdullah said. He urged the Jharkhand government to engage with the protesting students and address their grievances.

The protest against the alleged irregularities in recruitment exams in Jharkhand entered its 14th day on Friday with two student unions announcing that they would hold a march to the state assembly, which is in session, during the day.

The demonstrators have been demanding cancellation of the 14th Jharkhand PSC Civil Services Examination and an independent probe into the alleged irregularities in the recruitment test either by the CBI or by a panel of retired high court judges from outside the state.

They also stressed comprehensive reforms in the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) and the Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC).

Responding to a question on recent political developments involving the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Omar dismissed suggestions of a "fixed match", alleging that attempts were being made to revive the party's credibility. "This party did not emerge on its own. Agencies created it. Whenever its image weakens, agencies make efforts to restore its credibility," he alleged, while also rejecting speculation surrounding PDP leader Iltija Mufti.

He took a dig at Iltija's biting incident and said she is not a child. During the Article 370 demonstration this week, police claimed that Iltija physically assaulted a police officer while he was discharging his duties. (PTI)

Govt stands with youth, opposition avoiding discussion in Parliament: Eknath Shinde

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: Dismissing the opposition's allegations that the government was "anti-youth", Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Friday said youth are the future of the country and will play a key role in making India a developed nation.

This comes a day after RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat came out strongly in support of Gen Z, saying their grievances are genuine and that protests by them do not make them "anti-national".

Talking to reporters here after meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Shinde also said the PM has always given importance to the youth but the opposition was not ready to discuss issues in Parliament.

Shinde, who heads key NDA ally Shiv Sena, said the six newly inducted MPs of his party were invited by Modi for tea and expressed confidence that the interaction would help boost development works in their constituencies.

He said he met the prime minister and discussed issues related rain and Maharashtra's development in general.

"We discussed the development work to be undertaken in their respective constituencies. This will benefit both the state government and the Centre, and our MPs will get support for development," Shinde said.

On RSS chief Bhagwat's remarks during an interaction with a gathering of youth in Mumbai on Thursday, Shinde said young people are the future of the country and will play a key role in achieving the goal of a "Viksit Bharat" by 2047.

"We are also seeing Prime Minister Modi's direct interaction with young people and that is a good thing," he said.

"PM Modi has always given importance to the youth. Whether it is education, startups or skill development, he has done a lot of work for the youth," Shinde said.

Bhagwat's interaction is being seen as the RSS' most significant outreach to Gen Z (born roughly 1997-2012) and Gen Alpha (2013-2025) since the Cockroach Janta Party's (CJP) protests over NEET paper leak culminated in Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation last

month.

On the Opposition's allegations that the government was "anti-youth", Shinde said Parliament was in session and all issues should be discussed there.

"First, they demanded the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan, and he resigned. The young people who were part of the agitation have now returned to their respective work. But the Opposition, despite Parliament being in session, is not ready for a discussion," he said.

"The government is ready to discuss the issue. The government stands with the youth, and it was out of respect and regard for the youth that Dharmendra Pradhan resigned," Shinde said. But they only want to do politics in the name of the youth and use them to serve their own political interests, which is very unfortunate, he said.

"Everyone should work together to take the country forward and raise their issues in Parliament. They are avoiding discussion and only indulging in politics. This is not right," Shinde added. (PTI)

Cal HC dismisses Kunal Ghosh's petition for direction to Speaker to allow him to speak in Assembly

KOLKATA, Aug 7: The Calcutta High Court on Friday dismissed a petition by TMC MLA Kunal Ghosh seeking an opportunity to participate in West Bengal Assembly debates, observing that he has to resolve the issue in the House itself.

Dismissing the petition of Ghosh, who belongs to the minority faction of the opposition Trinamool Congress, Justice Krishna Rao said this court cannot pass any order directing either the Speaker or the whip of the Assembly to give an opportunity of hearing to the petitioner.

The court observed that if the petitioner is aggrieved with giving an opportunity to speak, he has to resolve the issue in the Assembly itself.

Justice Rao observed that Article 212 of the Constitution bars this court from entertaining any such allegation, holding that the petition of Ghosh is as such not maintainable. Justice Rao said that Ghosh can raise his grievances before the Assembly. (PTI)

Centre must appoint full-time education minister, none in cabinet fit for post: Prithviraj Chavan

MUMBAI, Aug 7: Senior Congress leader Prithviraj Chavan on Friday dismissed the temporary charge of the education portfolio handed to Union Minister Pralhad Joshi as a mere stopgap, urging the Centre to appoint a leader of national stature capable of connecting with Gen Z and fixing the "broken" system.

Chavan, in a post on X, claimed no current cabinet member fits the role and added that the Congress and Gen Z would not accept Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis's move to Delhi for the post, given the involvement of several coaching institutes in the state in the NEET paper leak.

"The historic agitation by the CJP and Gen Z has claimed its first scalp: that of the Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan — a landmark moment. The PM has given a temporary charge to Pralhad Joshi, who already holds three portfolios and now

juggles a fourth. This is clearly a stopgap till the monsoon session of Parliament. The prime minister will soon have to name a full-time Education Minister — someone of national stature who can connect with Gen Z, fix the broken educational system, and push for increased funding for education. I don't see any such person in the current Cabinet," he wrote.

Referring to the speculation about bringing Fadnavis to Delhi for the role, Chavan stated that neither Gen Z nor the Congress will accept him.

"The 2026 NEET leak implicated several Maharashtra-based coaching institutes and paper-setters, and Fadnavis is also the state's Home Minister — hardly confidence-inspiring. Whether any ruling-party politicians in Maharashtra were also involved is something only a full SIT probe can establish," he charged. (PTI)

Mayawati seeks tough action on Una case

LUCKNOW, Aug 7: BSP chief and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mayawati on Friday urged the Gujarat government to effectively pursue the 2016 Una Dalit flogging case in the high court to ensure strict punishment for those responsible.

A special court in Veraval in Gujarat's Gir Somnath district had on March 16 convicted five persons and acquitted 35 others in the case, in which four Dalit men were assaulted while skinning a dead cow. The incident had triggered nationwide protests.

In a post on X, Mayawati alleged that the acquittal of most of the accused reflected "government bias, negligence and apathy" towards the interests and safety of Dalits.

She said the victim families were facing serious financial and other challenges in challenging the trial court's verdict before the high court. (PTI)

'Our effort, along with IIT Jammu and the Centre of Excellence, is to develop AI models' IIT Jammu's AI centre, Project Phoenix to drive innovation, entrepreneurship in J-K: CM

JAMMU, Aug 7: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday said the newly launched AI Centre of Excellence at IIT Jammu would focus on developing technology-driven solutions to the UT's challenges, while Project Phoenix would promote entrepreneurship and self-employment among the youth.

The Artificial Intelligence (AI) Centre of Excellence has been established jointly by the Government of India, the Jammu and Kashmir government and IIT Jammu. Underscoring the significance of the Project Phoenix, the chief minister told reporters here: "To promote self-employment and entrepreneurship, IIT Jammu today launched an excellent programme called Project Phoenix. Its objective will be to identify entrepreneurs, support them and provide them with mentorship, market access and training."

After the launch, Abdullah said



that AI should be harnessed to address region-specific issues rather than being viewed merely as a technological tool.

"We all hear about AI and many of us use platforms like ChatGPT and Gemini. The question is whether AI can help solve Jammu and Kashmir's problems," he said.

The chief minister said AI could improve education in remote areas, assist in diagnosing diseases and suggesting treatment where spe-

cialist doctors are unavailable, help identify diseases affecting orchards at an early stage and provide more accurate, location-specific weather forecasts to minimise damage from natural disasters.

Referring to the recent heavy rainfall in Rajouri and Reasi, Abdullah said authorities often receive district-level weather forecasts but lack precise information on where the heaviest rainfall or maximum damage is likely to

occur.

"Our effort, along with IIT Jammu and the Centre of Excellence, is to develop AI models that can help address these challenges," he said.

Describing unemployment as one of Jammu and Kashmir's biggest challenges, Abdullah reiterated that government jobs alone could not provide a solution.

"We have repeatedly said that the answer to unemployment does not lie in government jobs alone. We have to create opportunities through self-employment and entrepreneurship," he said.

The Project Phoenix will work in tandem with the government's Mission YUVA scheme to create a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem in the UT, according to him.

"I believe the budding entrepreneurs of Jammu and Kashmir will benefit greatly from the collaboration between Mission YUVA and Project Phoenix," he said. (PTI)

No Indian umpire at Hockey WC after 28 years, veterans say focus should be on structured pathway

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: The absence of an Indian umpire or technical official at the upcoming FIH Men's Hockey World Cup after nearly three decades has left former international officials disappointed, with veterans saying the focus should be on a structured pathway.

For the first time since the 1998 World Cup in Utrecht, the tournament, beginning on August 15 in the Netherlands and Belgium, will not have any Indian umpire or technical official. European countries account for the bulk of the panel.

India has produced only four men's World Cup umpires in the modern era -- Amarjit Singh Bawa (1990), Tarlok Singh Bhullar (1994), Satinder Sharma (2002, 2006, 2010) and R V Raghu Prasad (2010, 2014, 2018 and 2023).

Raghu Prasad, the first Asian umpire to officiate in 200 international matches before retiring last year, said appointments for elite events are based on sus-

tained performances in top-level competitions.

"The FIH Umpiring Committee selects officials for major tournaments after assessing performances in previous World Cups, the Olympics, the Pro League and other international competitions. Consistency over a period of time is the biggest criterion," he told PTI.

Satinder Sharma, who officiated in multiple Olympics and World Cups, described India's absence from the World Cup officiating panel as disappointing.

"After Bawa Sir and Bhullar Sir, Raghu and I carried forward that legacy. It was never easy to establish ourselves among the European officials," he said.

"Our men's team did not qualify for the 2008 Beijing Olympics, but I was still India's only representative there as an official. That shows how much importance is attached to consistent performances. At present, I feel we are



lagging behind."

According to Hockey India's list updated in May 2025, the men's umpiring structure comprises four categories -- Core Leading Panel, Leading Panel, High Potential and National Umpires -- with more than 100 officials. The

women's structure has over 70 officials.

However, only six Indian men and four women are on the FIH umpiring panel, with Raghu's retirement reducing the active men's strength further.

Similarly, India has only four men's and two women's FIH technical officials despite having a sizeable domestic pool.

Sharma said Indian umpires needed greater exposure to international hockey to bridge the gap.

"If domestic umpires don't officiate in major international tournaments, how will they gain experience? There is a huge difference between domestic and international umpiring," he said.

"Umpires should also be part of national coaching camps so they understand the demands of modern hockey. We have talent, but officials need opportunities and support from the federation. Proper planning and a structured pathway are essential if India wants repre-

sentation at the next World Cup or Olympics."

Bawa, who officiated at the 1990 Lahore World Cup and the 1988 Seoul Olympics before retiring in 1994, recalled the lack of recognition for umpires during his career.

"When I started, we received a daily allowance of only ₹ 20, which later increased to ₹ 100 during KPS Gill's tenure. In those days, umpires were hardly considered an important part of the sport," said Bawa, now settled in Canada.

"There were no medals or souvenirs for umpires either. It was during the 1977 Ranjit Singh Tournament in Amritsar, we ensured that officials were also honoured."

The three veterans agreed that poor financial security remains one of the biggest deterrents for aspiring umpires.

"In our time, we received ₹ 150-200 a day in domestic tournaments and an al-

lowance of USD 40-50 during international assignments. Even today, most Indian umpires are either unemployed or officiate only in domestic competitions," Sharma said.

Raghu, who took up a private job after retiring from international umpiring last year, said the profession offered little financial stability.

"As long as I was umpiring, I devoted myself entirely to it. After retirement, I had to find a private job through my own efforts, and the income is modest. In such circumstances, why would parents encourage their children to become umpires?" he said.

"Players receive awards, government jobs and recognition for outstanding performances. Umpires receive neither salaries nor meaningful incentives. Even those who are employed often struggle to get leave for international assignments." (PTI)

Indian bowlers make comeback after poor first session; SLC XI post 363/8

COLOMBO, Aug 7: Indian bowling unit got some rough treatment from Sri Lanka's Gen-Next batters before Kuldeep Yadav-led spinners scripted a recovery in the final session as the hosts posted 363 for 8 to end their first innings on the opening day of the three-day warm-up game here on Friday.

Since the match doesn't have first-class status -- each team will bat 90 overs on days one and two and 45 overs each on the final day.

However at the end of the first day, head coach Gautam Gambhir and skipper Shubman Gill, who didn't take the field due to an impact injury that he suffered during a training session, will have a lot to ponder.

If day's performance is an indicator, off-spinner Saransh Jain (0/54 in 11 overs) will find it difficult to be in contention with both Kuldeep (2/76 in 18 overs) and Manav Suthar (1/30 in 11 overs) doing well. Seasoned Ravindra Jadeja (2/64 in 15 overs) looked out of sync despite getting a couple of wickets.

Playing a red-ball game after five weeks, the pacers were understandably rusty while the spinners despite sharing bulk of the spoils didn't look menacing enough till Kuldeep found his mojo and asked a few probing questions.

Otherwise, the Day One primarily belonged to young island batters, some of whom have just started off with their Test ca-



Warm-Up Game

reers, looked at ease while facing the Indian attack on a mostly benign Nondescripts Cricket Club track which provided some purchase for Kuldeep towards the fag end of the day.

There were two Sri Lankan batters, whose batting stood on the first day.

The first one was opener Nishan Fernando (66 off 65), who played the senior Indian pacers -- Mohammed Siraj (0/44 in 13 overs), and Prasadhi Krishna (0/32 in 8 overs) -- with ease.

Gurnoor Brar (1/49 in 12 overs) was the only pacer who looked incisive.

Fernando had recently played Tests on the tour to the West Indies.

The 110-run opening stand with Ravindu Rasantha (71 off 143 balls) had Indian pacers and spinners scurrying for cover as they scored runs at a quick clip before an unfortunate mix-up led to Fernando's run-out.

The second one was southpaw Sonal Dinusha (52 off 72 balls), who displayed admirable technique and the only batter in the

middle-order who read Kuldeep from the wrist and hit a regal straight six.

The SLC XI skipper Dinusha had scored 92 against West Indies in a Test match recently.

With another Sri Lanka international Ramesh Mendis (32 off 49) for company, he added 64 for the seventh wicket, with some fantastic hitting, the slog sweep in particular being his 'Go-To' shot.

Indian bowlers did have their moments, especially the manner in which Kuldeep varied the speed of his deliveries after going for 29 in five overs in his first spell.

He got Ahan Wickramasinghe with a delivery that jumped a tad when the batter tried to sweep and the top edge was taken by Brar at short-fine leg.

The second one was an arm-ball that skidded to hit the pads of Anjala Bandara.

Suthar had the best economy, and removed one of the openers Rasantha, deceiving him in flight when the batter came down the track but couldn't reach to the pitch of the delivery.

He got another one with the second new ball with a delivery that was fired full with an angle to get a set Dinusha.

In the case of Jadeja, he didn't initially attack the stumps but when he did, he did get the results.

However he got two wickets but looked really rusty. (PTI)

Ashmita, Rakshitha book Korea Masters semifinal showdown



ASAN (SOUTH KOREA), Aug 7: India's Ashmita Chaliha and Rakshitha Ramraj will square off in the women's singles semifinals of the USD 250,000 Korea Masters Super 300 badminton tournament after registering hard-fought wins in their respective quarterfinals here on Friday.

World No. 50 Ashmita produced the biggest upset of the tournament so far, shocking top seed and World No. 22 Hina Akechi of Japan 20-22 21-15 21-19 in a gripping quarterfinal at the Asan Yi Sun-sin Gymnasium.

The victory also helped the Indian avenge a defeat in their only previous meeting at the Malaysia Super 100 last year.

Rakshitha, meanwhile, came back from a game down to upset third seed and compatriot Tanvi Sharma 18-21 21-19 21-18 in a contest that lasted over an hour. It was her fourth win over Tanvi, who had claimed her maiden BWF title at Taipei Open last week.

However, India's Krishna Prasad Garaga and Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy crashed out after suffering a 7-21, 8-21 loss to Malaysia's Man Wei Chong and Soh Wooi Yik.

Ashmita vs Hina
In a battle between two left-handers, Hina opened up a 7-5 lead before Ashmita drew level at 7-7. The two relied on angled returns to push each other into the deep corners, but a few errors from the Indian helped the Japanese take an 11-9 advantage at the mid-game interval.

Ashmita stayed within touching distance, pulling level at 12-12 and again at 15-15 before moving ahead 17-15 and 18-16. She also earned a game point at 20-19 after Hina found the net but failed to convert it. Hina then drew level before Ashmita hit wide, allowing the

Japanese to pocket the opening game with a cross-court winner.

Ashmita responded strongly after the change of ends. Locked at 7-7, she reeled off six straight points to surge to a 13-7 lead. Although Hina reduced the deficit to 14-16, the Indian remained composed, claiming five of the next six points to force the match into the decider.

The deciding game followed a similar pattern, with Ashmita racing to a 9-3 lead and carrying an 11-9 advantage into the interval. She stretched it to 18-11 before Hina mounted a spirited comeback, winning six consecutive points to narrow the gap to 17-18. Ashmita, however, held her nerve in the closing stages to seal a memorable victory.

Rakshitha vs Tanvi

Rakshitha raced to a 13-8 lead in the opening game before Tanvi mounted a remarkable comeback, reeling off eight of the next nine points to move from 8-13 to 16-14 before closing out the game.

The second game was another closely-fought affair. Rakshitha held a narrow two-point advantage at the mid-game interval and eventually earned two game points after Tanvi found the net. She squandered the first but converted the second when Tanvi sent her return wide.

The decider followed a similar pattern, with Rakshitha taking a slender two-point lead into the interval. The scores were locked at 14-14 before Tanvi faltered at the crucial stage, committing three unforced errors to hand Rakshitha a 19-16 lead.

Another errant cross-court smash gave Rakshitha four match points, and she sealed the victory when Tanvi found the net once again. (PTI)

Gill skips Day 1 of practice game against SLC XI due to finger injury

COLOMBO, Aug 7: India captain Shubman Gill will not take the field on the opening day of the practice match against SLC XI here on Friday after sustaining an injury to his right finger during practice. Gill picked up the niggle during a training session here on Thursday and as result, KL Rahul is leading the side in his absence.

SLC XI has won the toss and opted to bat in the three-day practice game.

"Captain Shubman Gill sustained an impact injury to his right ring finger during India's practice on Thursday. As a precautionary measure, he will not take the field on Day 1 of the warm-up game against SLC XI. The BCCI Medical Team is monitoring his progress," the BCCI posted on its 'X' handle.

"KL Rahul will lead the team in Gill's absence."

India are touring Sri Lanka for a two-Test series, starting at Galle on August 15. The second Test will be played here from August 23. (PTI)

Praggnanandhaa wins St Louis Rapid and blitz

ST. LOUIS (USA), Aug 7: Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa clinched his maiden Saint Louis Rapid & Blitz title in emphatic fashion, sealing the championship with a round to spare here.

The 20-year-old finished with 23.5 points, comfortably ahead of Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan, one of the contenders for the world championship cycle.

Not losing any games on the final day of the last rapid and blitz in the Grand Chess tour, Praggnanandhaa jumped to second spot in the GCT which almost guarantees a place in the grand finale scheduled later this year. The Indian will just have to keep up his form in the last tournament of the season which will be played under Classical system.

After winning the rapid section with a marginal lead against Sindarov, Pragg lost only one game in the blitz and scored the requisite victories to end up with 11.5 points out of a possible 18. (PTI)

Open selection trials must, reduce dependence on foreign coaches: Mandaviya tells NSFs

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Friday stressed on the need for on-camera selection trials before major international events such as the upcoming Asian Games and reduced dependence on foreign coaches as he took stock of the National Sports Federations' operations at a conclave here.

The conclave was also attended by Minister of State for Sports Raksha Khadse, Sports Secretary Hari Ranjan Rao, and senior officials of the Sports Authority of India (SAI).

"Open selection trials should be recorded on camera in the presence of observers. There should be absolutely no compromise on transparency in the selection process," Mandaviya stated.

He said India urgently needs a strong indigenous coaching ecosystem to counter the reliance on foreign coaches, who have got high-profile positions in sports such as shooting, and boxing.

"We need to build a repository of quality Indian coaches. Along with training athletes, we must invest equally in training our coaches by providing them the best opportunities and international exposure. A well-trained coach will ultimately create world-class athletes for the country," Mandaviya said.

The conclave focused on discussing issues related to sports governance, enhancing athlete



welfare, and reviewing India's preparedness for the upcoming major international sporting events.

Detailed presentations on the NSFs compliance status with the National Sports Federations under the National Sports Governance Act, and preparations for the Asian Games in September-October, the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad were also made.

"It is our responsibility to ensure that no athlete is ever subjected to injustice. Injustice can take many forms, and wherever such a situation arises, the National Sports Governance Act, 2025

empowers us to take preventive and corrective measures," Mandaviya said in his address.

"The Prime Minister has consistently emphasised the need to keep athletes on the playing field and develop a strong league culture in the country. Every National Sports Federation must work towards creating greater competitive opportunities for athletes throughout the year," he added.

Doping concerns

The Minister reiterated the need for a comprehensive strategy to eliminate doping from Indian sports. Stressing that the existing framework requires strengthening, he said the Government is working on amendments to make the anti-doping ecosystem more effective.

"We must collectively tackle the menace of doping. It is not enough to act only against athletes. The entire chain -- from manufacturers and suppliers to facilitators and users -- must be identified and dealt with through a transparent and robust mechanism. Only then can we effectively eradicate doping from sports," he said.

NSF issues

Among the issues raised by NSFs was the delay in the notification for the National Sports Election Panel (NSEP), which would be responsible for overseeing the election process of sports bodies. The Minister said the NSEP would be notified very soon. (PTI)

Never thought I will get such reception: Arundhati on warm welcome at home base Kota

KOTA, Aug 7: Commonwealth Games gold-winning boxer Arundhati Chaudhary (70kg) was left emotionally overwhelmed as her hometown of Kota, which is better known as a coaching hub for medical and engineering students, laid out the red carpet to welcome her after her gutsy performance in Glasgow.

Arundhati's tremendous run at the event included wins over world championship bronze-winner Chantelle Reid in the finals. She upstaged defending champion Rosie Eccles in the semifinals.

A visibly emotional and exhausted Arundhati, who had been on a celebratory 250km road journey from Jaipur to Kota, offered her medal to her mother Sunita on finally reaching her home base.

"I earlier thought such enthusiastic and supportive environment for sports existed only in Haryana, but now it is not so, it does exist in Rajasthan also. It is for the first time that I received such a welcome from public as well as government in Rajasthan," she said on reaching here on Thursday night.

Speaking to PTI on Friday, Arundhati and her father Suresh Choudhary, who is also the president of Kota Boxing Association, detailed the journey filled with physical, financial and social challenges

"Cutting weight was a persistent difficulty," she noted.



Looking toward the future, Arundhati said her immediate priority is securing a spot for the upcoming

Olympic Games.

With less than two years remaining for the Games

in Los Angeles, her primary target is securing a qualification ticket at the upcoming World Championship scheduled next April.

Arundhati also shared the personal sacrifices involved in her strict competition regimen, particularly dietary restrictions while competing abroad as a vegetarian.

"I enjoyed four chapatis last night and yet wanted to have more," she said.

Suresh recounted the struggles that defined his daughter's rise.

"Boxing requires a proper ring and a professional coach, both of which Arundhati lacked in her early days," he said.

"She trained on asphalt surface at the Kota Stadium under a coach who initially had no background in boxing. He learned the techniques himself through YouTube videos to train her," he noted.

"In our community, women historically maintained a very traditional role and rarely went out alone. When Arundhati first wore sports shorts at the age of 15-16 to train, it met with heavy opposition from relatives and locals in Kota and Bundi," he recalled.

"People criticised me, saying I was foolish to let my daughter cut her hair short and train in shorts. I had to fight those societal perceptions continuously." (PTI)